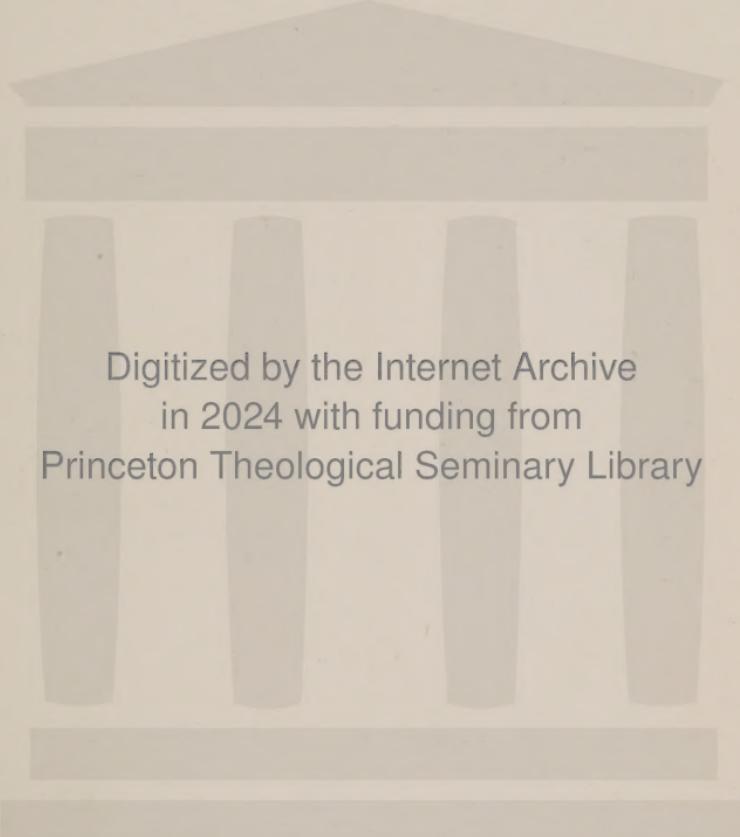


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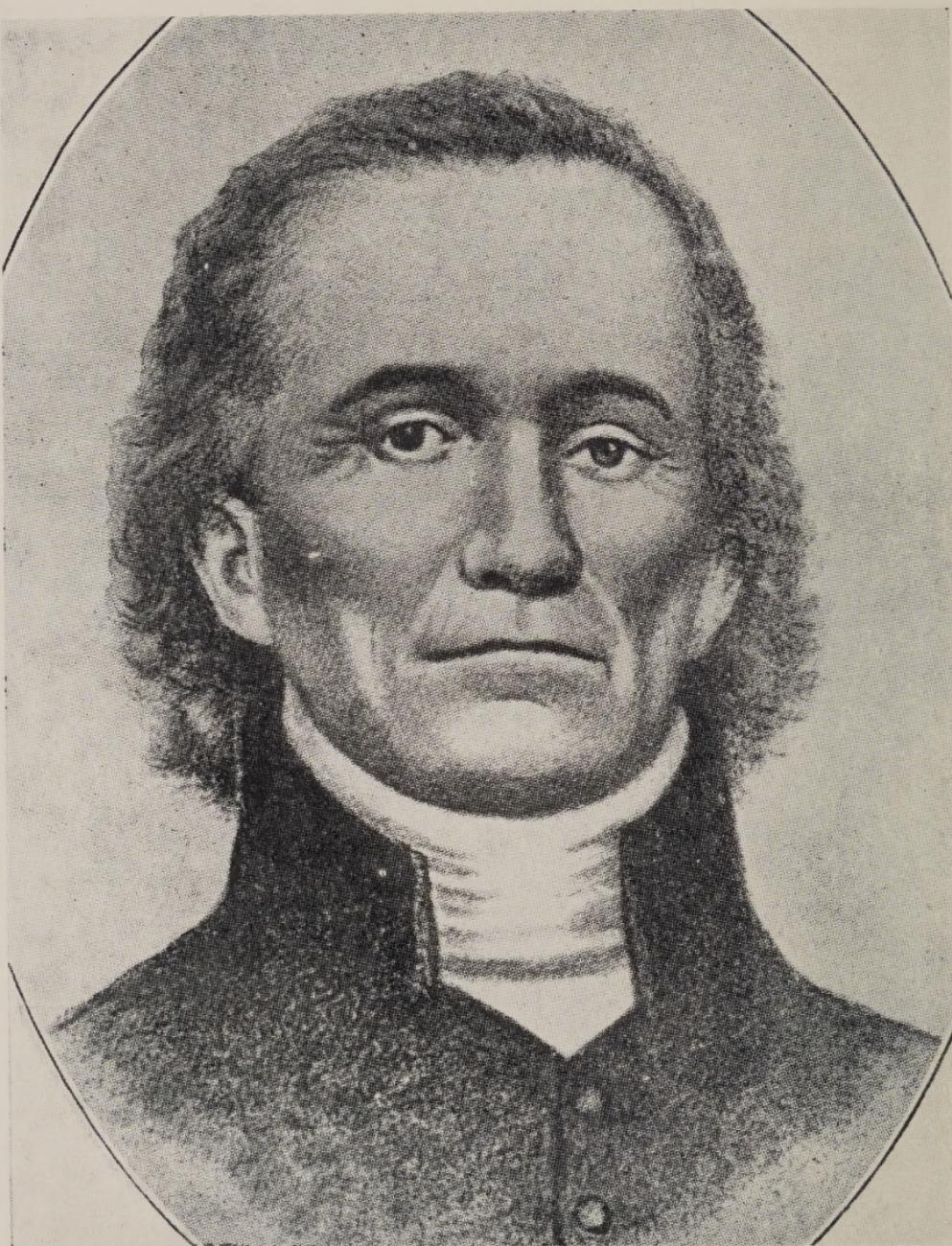
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HISTORY OF THE FREEWILL BAPTISTS



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HISTORY OF THE FREEWILL BAPTISTS

A Study in New England Separatism

By
NORMAN ALLEN BAXTER

AMERICAN BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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To my mother and
to my wife

PREFACE

THIS STUDY is an attempt to tell the story of that group of Freewill Baptists which originated in the closing decades of the eighteenth century in northern New England. The birth of such a body is typical of the revival pattern. Their growth reflects the mood of protest then arising against the Calvinism prevailing in New England. Both as a product of the Great Awakening and as proponents of a voluntaristic theology, the Freewill Baptists are but one group in the total New England scene of religious proliferations. It is the hope of the author that this book will be but the first stage in a larger treatment of this devolution.

The major primary sources of information concerning the Freewill Baptists are to be found in the New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord, N.H., the Bates College Library, Lewiston, Maine, and in the American Baptist Historical Society, now located in Rochester, New York. In addition, other libraries which provided significant and often unique holdings were the Massachusetts Historical Society, the Boston Athenaeum, and the American Antiquarian Society. The Andover Harvard Theological Library and the Widener Library of Harvard University were, of course, indispensable. To the personnel of all these libraries I am deeply grateful. To Elisabeth Anthony Dexter I express my gratitude for the generous manner in which she made available to me the papers of her father, Alfred Williams Anthony.

For guidance in the research and actual writing of this book I am indebted to Professor George Huntston Williams of the Harvard Divinity School. Dr. Richard D. Pierce of Emerson College and Andover-Newton Theological Institution first suggested this study. I hasten to acknowledge my debt to him. Professor Raymond Bean of Crozer Theological

Seminary gave an invaluable lead to the early records. I am grateful to the American Baptist Historical Society for their confidence in this work which has resulted in their readiness to be identified with it. The Reverend E. C. Starr, Curator of the American Baptist Historical Society, has given counsel at several stages. Dr. Robert G. Torbet has generously contributed the Foreword and made numerous valuable suggestions.

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L. K. M. Rosenberry, for her *The Expansion of New England*; D. G. Tewksbury, for his *The Founding of American Colleges and Universities before the Civil War*; Mrs. J. T. Adams for her late husband's *Revolutionary New England, 1691-1776*.

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FOREWORD

WITHIN recent years there has been a resurgence of interest in the writing of Baptist history on the part of a number of young scholars. The present study is an expression of this trend. Dr. Norman A. Baxter, a rising young church historian, has devoted careful research to a neglected area of the Baptist heritage. The Freewill Baptists of New England provide a rich opportunity for research in hitherto unused source materials. Moreover, their story is important to the fuller understanding of the Baptist contribution to American life, and more especially to the revolt against Calvinism in New England.

Dr. Baxter has based his narrative upon the primary sources which he has examined with skill and insight into their significance in the larger context of New England Separatism. Writing from the well-rounded point of view of the trained historian, he has sought to discover the influences which played upon Benjamin Randall and his followers. He has also sought to indicate their influence in turn upon the life of their times. His story, therefore, takes on perspective and dimension which is important to an understanding of this significant group of Baptists.

Baptists, in particular, will be in his debt for the task which he has accomplished, for Freewill Baptists, now a part of the American Baptist Convention, have exerted an influence on American Christianity out of proportion to their numerical strength. All serious students of church history will welcome Dr. Baxter's contribution to a neglected aspect of American religious knowledge. It is also hoped that this book will receive a wide reading by all who are interested

in the intriguing story of the revolt against Calvinism to which Freewill Baptists contributed so notably.

ROBERT G. TORBET.

*The Board of Education and Publication,
American Baptist Convention,
New York City.*

CHAPTER I

BEGINNINGS OF A MOVEMENT, 1770-1780

EARLY LIFE OF RANDALL

Randall the Unconverted. The account of the Freewill Baptist denomination¹ must begin with Benjamin Randall,² its founder and leader from 1780 until his death in 1808. Randall's personal and religious history is an exceptionally good point of departure for he reflects the theological and social characteristics of his day.³ Born in New Castle, New

¹ The terms "Freewillers," "New Lights," "General Provisioners," "Open Communionists," and "Randallites" were all applied to the followers of Randall as epithets of derision. About 1800 these people adopted the term "Freewill," and, when applied to their term "Baptist Church of Christ," they became known as the Freewill Baptists. Frederick L. Wiley (ed.) *Centennial Souvenir of the New Hampshire Yearly Meeting of Free Baptists, 1792-1892* (Laconia, 1892), p. viii. In 1841, when the Freewill Baptists united with the Free Communion Baptists, it was voted that they considered "the name of Free Baptist, Free Communion Baptist, Freewill Baptist, and Open Communion Baptist as designating the same people." *Minutes of the General Conference of the Freewill Baptist Connection* (Dover, 1859), p. 192. The title Freewill Baptist is used in this study since it indicates the doctrine which gave rise to the denomination although it is recognized that at first it will be anachronistic.

² In the earliest writings which we have in Randall's own hand he spelled his name Randal. By 1804, however, his name appeared as Randal in *Two Mites . . . by Henry Alline . . . with some amendments by B. Randal . . .* (Dover, 1804). The first appearance of the new spelling in his own handwriting was in March 1808. New Durham Church Records, I, 221. These are in manuscript at the New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord. By 1859 the spelling Randall had come into general use and has been commonly accepted. It is the spelling followed in this study.

³ The oldest and most complete source we have for Randall's life is John Buzzell, *The Life of Elder Benjamin Randal* (Limerick, Maine, 1827). The journal which Buzzell used for this work is no longer extant, although a portion of it was reprinted in *A Religious Magazine*, II (1821), 206-216. *The Morning Star*, from April 1859 to March 1860 printed a life of Randall, written by the then editor, Isaac Dalton Stewart. It adds considerably to our knowledge of Randall because Stewart availed himself of the knowledge of those then living who had known him personally. Another value of Stewart's work is that it substantiates Buzzell's accuracy as a biographer.

Hampshire, in 1749, the son of a sea captain,⁴ the boy was always a serious minded youth. His journal states that even at the age of five, he "seldom closed his eyes in sleep, without praying to God . . . and was so affected he could not refrain from weeping."⁵ Further, he had an intense fear of God for he said "I thought that He was a great monarch dwelling in an admirable city."⁶ With this fear heavy upon him, young Randall strove to be a virtuous child so that he might go to the "good place" and not to the "deep pit, somewhere under where we live."⁷ As a result of this endeavour, Randall said that he did not remember ever speaking a profane word.⁸ In spite of his early impressions of God and the subsequent earnest endeavours to live righteously, Randall's life was devoid of a vital religious experience.

Randall's education in this early period consisted of attendance at the Province Free School in Portsmouth where he studied the usual subjects of reading, spelling, writing, geography, and grammar.⁹ His schoolmaster asserted that he stood at the head of his class. His formal training was unfortunately interrupted when his father suffered several misfortunes with his ships and the lad went to sea at the age of nine. His first trip was to Virginia with his father, and on it he became so ill that he said later he thought he was going

⁴ Randall's ancestry, both maternal and paternal, was English. One of his father's ancestors was John Randall, a Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford. Randall's mother was the daughter of a sea captain on one of the islands in the English Channel. The Randall family residence was in New Castle, the focus of colonial New Hampshire's social and cultural life, where they were members of the Congregational church. Randall's family tree is given in *The Morning Star*, April 20, 1859. See also a folder entitled "Benjamin Randall: Collateral Notes" in the Alfred Williams Anthony papers in the possession of Elisabeth Anthony Dexter, Belmont, Massachusetts. Henceforth these papers will be referred to as the Anthony papers, Dexter, to distinguish them from the Anthony papers in the American Baptist Historical Society at Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, Rochester, New York, which will be cited as Anthony papers, A.B.H.S.

⁵ Buzzell, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.

⁶ *Religious Magazine*, II (1821), 206.

⁷ *Loc. cit.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ C. W. Brewster, *Rambles About Portsmouth* (2nd ed.; Portsmouth, 1873), II, 208.

to die. Nevertheless he stayed with this vocation, attending school briefly between voyages, until his eighteenth birthday when his father "gave up the idea of making a sailor of me."¹⁰ The profanity of the sailors had been intolerable to the young seaman and so his father arranged with a Portsmouth sailmaker by the name of Tripe to teach the boy that trade. Randall spent the next three years as Tripe's apprentice. He might have remained a sailmaker for life except for an accident and a discovery.

About the time of his twenty-first birthday, his father gave Benjamin a new suit. Young Randall proudly wore it to a social gathering where he inadvertently sat on a recently painted chair that had not yet thoroughly dried. On returning home, he found his suit badly mottled. Fearing that his father would discover his carelessness, Randall ripped the suit apart, turned it inside out and sewed the seams together again. This began his career as a tailor.¹¹ As both a sailmaker and a tailor, "he gave the sea captains good sails and his patrons in Portsmouth good fits in fashionable suits."¹²

During this time of secular occupation, Randall was under periodic distress of soul. His fellow workers seemed to know this for they frequently joked with him about his becoming a preacher. "Ben," they said, "you should be a preacher." But Randall's own answer was somewhat evasive. His words were: "I had no idea of being a minister; for I thought it was an abominable thing for any one to attempt to preach without a college education and my advantages were very small."¹³ But when George Whitefield came to Portsmouth in September 1770, Randall went to hear him. He not only heard him once but thrice, and each time with the same effect, simultaneous power and wrath. Randall's response to this preaching was given in the following words: "Ah, thought I, you are a worthless noisy fellow; . . . O how wonder-

¹⁰ *Religious Magazine*, II (1821), 208.

¹¹ Raymond Bean, "Benjamin Randall and the Baptists," *The Chronicle*, XV (1952), 99.

¹² John Scales, *History of Strafford County* (Chicago, 1914), p. 444.

¹³ *Religious Magazine*, II (1822), 214.

fully he spake! as one having authority . . ."¹⁴ Randall was on his way to hear Whitefield once more when a messenger came riding along, crying: "Mr. Whitefield is dead. He died this morning at Newbury, about six o'clock."¹⁵

This event was so pivotal in Randall's life that his own words are necessary.

As soon as his voice reached my ears, an arrow from the quiver of the Almighty struck through my heart; and a mental voice sounded through my soul. The first thoughts that passed through my mind were, Whitefield is now in heaven, and I am on the road to hell. I trembled. Every part of my body was affected, as well as my mind. My former religion appeared altogether worthless and fled from me as though it had never been. It seemed as if there never was any person so vile as I, nor any one possessed of such heart alienation, and enmity to God in all his nature. Why should I be so distressed? ¹⁶

Following this tremendous shock, Randall spent the next two weeks in much prayer, breathing out the following words often:

O God of mercy, hear my call.
My load of guilt remove,
Break down the separating wall
Which bars me from Thy love.¹⁷

While thus praying and meditating, Randall happened upon the words of the letter to the Hebrews 9:26 which read: "But now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." Three times these words passed through his mind and finally he began to think of their meaning. He said: "As I was meditating on this passage, my load and burden of sin went off; and I began to feel calm and peaceable in mind."¹⁸

¹⁴ Buzzell, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

This deliverance only served to frighten Randall for now he had no concern for sin, whereas before he had been distressed. In the midst of this renewed anxiety he began to reason :

What does this mean? What state was I in, when I was taken with this distress? I was in love with the world and its vanities. The world and all its vanities are now loathsome to me—I hate sin and folly and have no relish for any earthly good. What do I love? I know I love God and long after righteousness. What then is this but a change wrought by the power of God in my soul. This is conversion; this is what I read of in the scriptures, being born again, etc. As soon as I believed this, I gave glory to God; and O! what love, joy, and peace filled my soul! Now I saw a just God and a Saviour; and, in Christ, I beheld a blessed sacrifice for sin, to the full satisfaction of Divine Justice. O! thought I, Jesus is precious to me. My soul kept crying, Jesus, Jesus. It seemed as if I had 10,000 souls, I could trust them all with Jesus.¹⁹

The most extraordinary aspect of this conversion experience is that the death of a Calvinistic evangelist had induced in Randall a conversion experience which was universalistic in its concepts. Randall's own words were:

I saw in him a universal love, universal atonement, a universal call to mankind, and was confident that none would ever perish but those who refused to obey it. O, what love I felt to all mankind and wished that they all might share in that fullness which I saw so extensive and so free for them all.²⁰

Randall the Congregationalist. After this experience, Randall sought others who had also "experienced a change." He started worshipping with a group of Congregationalists in Portsmouth who had split off from the two regular Congregational churches in the city.²¹ He vigorously maintained his

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-21.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21. It is interesting to compare Randall's conversion and call with that of Henry Alline, the New Light evangelist in Nova Scotia. There are many analogues, but the only important variant is that Alline remained a Congregationalist. See M. W. Armstrong, *The Great Awakening in Nova Scotia 1776-1809* (Hartford, 1948), pp. 61-64.

²¹ See below, p. 17.

private life of devotion. After his marriage to Joanna Oram, daughter of a Kittery, Maine, sea captain in November 1771, the young couple resolved to maintain a family altar. It was the approaching birth of their first child that prompted Randall to seek full membership in the Congregational church in New Castle.²² His joining the church was rather an automatic affair. When he visited the minister, the Reverend Stephen Chase, and stated his business, the only response was that Randall had merely come to a sense of his duty. No questions were asked of him which prompted Randall to tell the minister what had taken place in his life. Still no comment was forthcoming. When Randall asked for instruction, Mr. Chase gave him a copy of the covenant which he took home, studied earnestly and then subscribed his name. The following month, November 1772, Mr. and Mrs. Randall joined the church and in December their first child was christened.²³

Joining the church at New Castle was a disillusioning experience for Randall. As Buzzell said: ". . . he began to discover that the church he had so lately joined was all in disorder."²⁴ Some of its members lived intemperate and godless lives and on one occasion Randall communed beside one who was inebriated. This distressed Randall no end; his food became unpalatable and sleep left him. While the rest of the townsfolk were asleep, he paced the streets, praying to God for his fellow men; yet because of tradition and propriety he did not dare to speak to anyone, not even in private, concerning his great burden.

This state of affairs continued until 1773. During that summer, Randall spoke to certain church members about

²² Buzzell, *op. cit.*, p. 25. Randall, by virtue of his parents' membership in the New Castle church, was already a "half way" member of it, but without the privilege of communion. When he sought to join the church in 1772 it was to make a public profession of faith and thereby become eligible to participate in the sacrament and to qualify his child for christening.

²³ Mrs. Randall was a covenant member in full standing in Kittery, Maine, prior to this. *Morning Star*, April 16, 1859.

²⁴ Buzzell, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

Jesus, but always in the privacy of their homes. About this time he thought it best to get these friends, with whom he had spoken, to meet with him for the purpose of singing, praying, and reading a sermon. Since such a move was out of the ordinary, Randall took the precaution of inviting Mr. Chase to meet with them. While he seemed pleased at first, the minister never came to the meetings. As the gatherings increased in frequency, Randall came under the conviction that he should become a preacher. Shunning this, he invited a preacher visiting in Portsmouth to come to New Castle. There was opposition to this from Mr. Chase and Randall found the church building closed to his friend. The selectmen finally opened it for the particular meeting involved, but this incident involved Randall in real difficulty.

The minister now refused to speak to Randall when they met on the street. As communion Sunday was drawing nigh, Randall knew that he could not receive the sacred morsels from the hand of one who would not speak to him. Consequently he resolved to settle the matter in private with the minister. He went to his house and, as he approached, he saw him standing at the window. When he entered, he was informed that the minister was busy. He waited until nine that evening and then returned without seeing the clergyman.²⁵ At the service a few days later, Randall partook of the communion elements, but said that he communed with Christ as a single member and that he was not in fellowship with the other communicants. Randall now made his choice. In May 1775 he deliberately absented himself from the communion and thereby expressed his withdrawal from the church.²⁶

²⁵ Buzzell, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

²⁶ In a volume of the Elders Conference Records, manuscript volumes at the New Hampshire Historical Society, there was found a slip of paper in the handwriting of John Buzzell. It throws more light on the New Castle church at this period and also upon the matter before us. It reads: "He was not dismissed but left of his own accord. It seems that this church was very destitute of discipline, suffering persons with little or no restriction to enter or leave much at will and [here are two illegible words] which is as they might choose at will."

At the same time that Randall was struggling spiritually, the British warship *Scarborough* was in the New Castle harbour, engaged in an attack on the island. This fighting led Randall to enlist in the army in May 1775, so that he "might at least deal food and raiment to a defensive and patriotic soldiery." He served a term of three months as an assistant commissary.²⁷ At the end of that time, he removed his family to Maine and returned to New Castle where he volunteered for another three months, this time as an orderly sergeant in the company of Captain John Calfe. When this service had been rendered the danger to New Castle was over and Randall returned to his trade and his meetings. ²⁸

Randall the Baptist Preacher. About the time that Randall enlisted for his first period of military duty, the third of their eight children was born.²⁹ This event stimulated Randall to study the Scriptures on the matter of infant baptism during his army career. Sometime during his two stints of duty, he came to the conclusion that believers only were the proper subjects for Christian baptism. Consequently he surrendered his former belief in the propriety of infant baptism, but he spoke of it as "taking away a right hand."³⁰ Although he himself had come to the Baptist position in regard to believer's baptism, he did not communicate this break to his wife and consented to the christening of their third child.

At the same time that Randall was studying the Scriptures on the baptism issue, there returned to him the conviction that he should preach. He cast it aside then but early in 1776 the urge returned. He answered it with all possible arguments but he was directed to the Scriptures, opened them, and read Mark 6:41 where the disciples were remonstrating that the five loaves and two fishes were not enough to feed the crowd. Still, under the touch of the Master's hand, they proved to

²⁷ I. W. Hammond (comp. and ed.), *Rolls of the Soldiers in the Revolutionary War* (Concord, 1885), I, 101.

²⁸ *Morning Star*, July 7, 1859.

²⁹ For the names of Randall's issue, see the folder " Benjamin Randall: Collateral Notes " in Anthony papers, Dexter.

³⁰ Buzzell, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

be more than sufficient. This demonstration of Christ's power silenced his pleas of personal inadequacy, said Randall, but it was not yet enough to make him a preacher.

To trouble him further, the feeling came over Randall that he himself should be immersed. He was afraid, however, to reveal this to his friends that met with him regularly, lest it break their fellowship. For a time he intended to go to Stratham, New Hampshire, and quietly be baptized there by a Baptist physician, Samuel Shepard, who was serving as a Calvinistic Baptist lay preacher.³¹ However, before he could accomplish this, an ordination service was held in nearby Madbury, New Hampshire, and while attending it Randall and three others were baptized there by the newly ordained minister of the Madbury church, Mr. William Hooper. After baptism Randall joined this church.³²

Randall returned home to New Castle, rejoicing in his immersion experience, but still resisting the call to preach. With this heavy upon his mind, he went to one of the meetings of his group and as he finished reading the sermon, one of the little company said to him: "Brother Randall, I am tired of hearing you read old sermons. If you will not preach to us, do leave off reading the old sermons and read the Bible."³³ This made a great impression on Randall, especially

³¹ William Hurlin, O. C. Sargent, W. W. Wakeman, *The Baptists of New Hampshire* (Manchester, 1902), p. 10, gives the following note on Shepard: "Samuel Shepard was a young physician who was a member of a Congregational church. At the house of a patient in Stratham he saw one of the books of Norcott on baptism which Mrs. Scammon had distributed. He read the book and was convinced of its truth, and on June 11, 1770, he was baptized by the Reverend Hezekiah Smith who on June 20 baptized fifteen persons in Stratham and on July 18 he organized a Baptist church in that town . . . a Baptist church in Nottingham . . . and another in Brentwood . . . these with the Stratham church were placed under the care of Dr. Shepard." Isaac Backus, *A History of New England*, David Weston (ed.), (2nd ed., Newton, Mass., 1871), II, 167, comments on this work of Mrs. Scammon in distributing books on baptism.

³² Bean, *op. cit.*, p. 102, says that Randall joined the church in Berwick, Maine. The answer to this apparent discrepancy lies in the words of Backus, *op. cit.*, II, 537: "Madbury contains a part of the Berwick church." Hurlin, *op. cit.*, p. 8, says that some of the members of the Berwick church resided in Madbury.

³³ Buzzell, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

the words, "If you will not preach . . ." Henceforth Randall determined that he would not read sermons, but only read the Bible to the flock. This occurred in February or March 1777.

At the very next meeting, Randall said that he took up the sermon book of Dr. Watts and also the Bible, hesitating between them as to which he would read.³⁴ Finally he began to read from the sermon book and as he read, his feelings, expressed in his words, were:

I began to die, as to the springs of life in my soul; and the more I read, the more I felt my life departing. O, how I felt! I threw down the book, and broke out into a confession and cried and told the people that the Lord had made it manifest to me, for two years past, that it was my duty to preach the gospel. Now I am resolved to be obedient and give myself up to his service as long as I live.³⁵

The momentousness of this decision is seen from the fact that the very next day Randall made a covenant with the Lord in which he made a full surrender of himself and his family to God. Buzzell reproduced this compact as follows:

Lord, take me and use me as seemeth good in thy sight. If it is thy will that I should preach the gospel, Lord, take me and send me where thou wilt, only go with me, and let me have the assistance of thy Spirit. . . . Lord, I do not count my life dear to myself, so that I may win souls to Jesus Christ. Here is also my wife and children. I give them up to thee. Now O Lord, accept of this hearty surrender which I make for Christ's sake. Amen.³⁶

³⁴ The revival in Hanover County, Virginia, had its origin in this same practice of a pious layman, in that case, Samuel Morris, who began to meet with his neighbours for the purpose of reading certain religious books, among them Whitefield's sermons. From these meetings religious interest spread and Morris was invited to read sermons in "reading houses," often erected for that specific purpose. W. W. Sweet, *Religion in Colonial America* (New York, 1942), pp. 294-295.

³⁵ Buzzell, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

³⁶ It appears anomalous to us that one who had so recently experienced a conversion which opened to him a vision of "universal love" should enter into a covenant relationship with God. However, it should be remembered that Randall was reared in a Congregational home and church and it is only natural that there should be some vestiges of the covenant doctrine still in his thinking.

The break was made. Randall was now a Baptist and a minister and both of these facts were soon known to the world at large. From this time on, he began to preach often and fearlessly. His schedule is seen by his own statement: "I preached fourteen times in a week and worked when I should have slept to maintain my family; for I had no way to maintain them but by hard labor."³⁷ These ardent endeavours met with some degree of success. People were often moved by his preaching and some would cry out during his sermons: "O Mr. Randall, what shall I do? I am a miserable, undone sinner!"³⁸ By the summer of 1777 thirty people had been converted under the ministry of the zealous evangelist.

As the fame spread, first opposition and then persecution appeared. This sometimes took the form of vicious attacks on Randall's person.³⁹ One of these may be mentioned because it reveals the utter sincerity and faith of the man. He was walking in the street one day when a large piece of brick was thrown at him. It brushed his head, and when it hit the board fence behind him it broke into pieces, so great was the force. A little surer aim and it would have undoubtedly killed or seriously maimed Randall. To this he said:

O may eternal praise be given to Him who shielded my life. I looked to see who sent it, but a thought struck my mind, I won't. Now I can pray. If I should know, it may be when I see them, I may feel some hardness⁴⁰

³⁷ Buzzell, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

³⁸ John Albee, New Castle, *Historic and Picturesque* (Boston, 1884), p. 88.

³⁹ The idea that a man could preach without collegiate preparation was utterly abhorrent to socially minded New Castle or to proper Portsmouth. Indeed it was Randall's own conviction. Cf. above, p. 3; Albee, *op. cit.*, p. 88, says that New Castle would have none of an uneducated preacher. In the light of the popular feeling for a learned ministry, it is not so startling that attempts should be made on Randall's person. He was violating a social as well as a theological convention. The feelings of New Castle people were that he should stick to his "palm" and leave the preaching to those decently prepared to do it. *Ibid.* The "palm" was a piece of leather worn by sailmakers over the palm of their hand for protection when sewing the canvas.

⁴⁰ Buzzell, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

On another occasion when Randall was scheduled to preach in a certain place, he was warned before he went that a mob of forty men had already laid plans to meet him at the edge of town and to tar and feather him before he could reach the meeting house. When informed of the exact number involved in the plot, Randall replied simply: "Ah, that is the devil's old regiment; he once raised forty men to kill brother Paul. He missed it; he will now. God calls, I must go."⁴¹ He did go, and revival and the conversion of most of the forty men followed his preaching.

In spite of this kind of opposition, Randall continued his preaching and extended it into the surrounding country areas. It was while he was on one of his tours that some men from the town of New Durham heard him. Being impressed, they invited him to come and preach for them. When the way opened, he went and found a "great moving on the minds of the people in general."⁴² He was then encouraged to move his family to New Durham but at that time he was not so disposed. However, he returned to New Durham alone the following fall. He then thought it proper to hold a day of fasting to determine whether the "thing proceeded from the Lord." When a committee was appointed and sent to Randall with a proposition for settlement, he told them that he "never intended to be confined to any people but meant to be every person's minister."⁴³ How true this was may be seen from the accounts of his later travels.

The actual call to New Durham was typical of Randall and also of the early Freewill Baptist movement. Aware of his family needs, Randall said to the committee: "I expect you will find me a house, and I mean that these hands of mine shall administer to my necessities."⁴⁴ The call thus con-

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁴³ It is interesting to note that Henry Alline, the New Light preacher in Nova Scotia, would not accept a call to a church except they gave him the permission "to go wherever the Lord our God in his providence shall call him." Armstrong, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-72.

⁴⁴ Buzzell, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-73.

cluded, Randall moved his family to New Durham in March 1778.

This brings us to the environment of Randall in terms of theology and society.

BACKGROUND OF RANDALL'S TIME AND PLACE

Economic and Social. Randall, with his conversion experience, his persecutions, and his preaching, is not to be understood without a knowledge of his times. The question must be asked, what human forces, if any, brought Randall to his ecclesiastical position? The formative period of Randall's life was now over. Was there in it any of what Richard Niebuhr would call "a secular character"? To answer this, the economic and then the religious conditions of the Portsmouth area in the last decades of the nineteenth century must be seen.

Randall's home town, New Castle, was on an island about three miles from Portsmouth. In the early days it was called Great Island and it was a most important and populous area, the centre of the colony's wealth and culture. The governor lived on the island, and several of the most influential settlers had their mansions there. Also, Fort William and Mary was located there to guard the harbour.⁴⁵

The prosperity of New Castle is seen in the meeting house which was built there in 1706. The bell was sent over from England; it had a beautiful altar piece and a silver communion service complete with a silver cup; above all it boasted a large folio Bible printed at Oxford, England.⁴⁶ The church was finer than the first Old South church building then standing at Portsmouth.⁴⁷

Speaking of Portsmouth itself a little later in the century, Lawrence said:

⁴⁵ D. H. Hurd (ed.), *History of Rockingham and Strafford Counties* (Philadelphia, 1882), p. 61.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 62. See also R. F. Lawrence, *New Hampshire Churches* (Claremont, N.H., 1856), p. 95, for about the same description of the New Castle church.

⁴⁷ Hurd, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

Portsmouth had been now long distinguished for its wealth and the generous hospitality of its principal families. The elegance and splendor of the old world were re-produced in this part of the new. Cocked hats and gold laced coats glided up the aisles of the old Meeting-house; while chariots with liveried footmen were standing at the door.⁴⁸

This splendour that Portsmouth radiated during its days as a colonial capital naturally centred in the ruling classes which, of course, were predominantly Anglican in their church affiliation. The Anglican Church in Portsmouth was Queen's Chapel. This parish was particularly prosperous and influential in the years from 1739 to 1773 when the Reverend Arthur Brown was its rector.⁴⁹ Even after the Revolution when the Anglican cause and Queen's Chapel both faded so pitifully,⁵⁰ the new group of social leaders, now invariably Congregationalists, did not allow the splendid social milieu to disintegrate. Thus it could still be said that "at the end of the century there were in Portsmouth many families of cultivation and many fine houses richly furnished which were the centres of a generous hospitality."⁵¹

Theological Scene. The social life of Portsmouth demanded that its clergy be equally at home in the pulpit or ballroom. Ezra Stiles met the double requirement with ease. He was described as "an accomplished gentleman, affable, mild and pleasing in his manners and entertaining in his conversation;

⁴⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 121.

⁴⁹ L. H. Thayer, *The Religious Conditions of New Hampshire during the Period 1750 to 1800* (Portsmouth, 1908?), p. 8.

⁵⁰ Timothy Alden, *An Account of the Religious Societies in Portsmouth, New Hampshire* (Boston, 1808), p. 26. After Brown's death in 1773 there were only occasional pulpit supplies until 1786. Then John Ogden succeeded Brown, but due to many factors he found it expedient to leave in 1793. Alden, *op. cit.*, p. 27. For an able account of why the Anglican Church declined after the Revolution see C. H. VanTyne, "The Clergy and the American Revolution," *American Historical Review*, XIX (1913-1914), pp. 44-64. Many factors, as VanTyne shows, were responsible for the colonial suspicion of the Anglicans and their "ruffle-shirted" Anglican governors and other officers. "Thus the American public was irritated by a nagging fear of intrusion by the Anglican Church." *Ibid.*, p. 47. When this fear was removed by the Revolution's successful conclusion the Anglican Church had a difficult time maintaining her churches.

⁵¹ Thayer, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

his company was courted by all ranks and ages in society."⁵² He was called to the presidency of Yale in 1778. His predecessor in the North parish in Portsmouth, Stephen Langdon, was called to the presidency of Harvard College in 1774.⁵³

The South parish in Portsmouth was also adequately served. William Shurtleff, who formerly served at New Castle, was graduated from Harvard in 1707. He was followed by Job Strong, Yale, 1747. Jonathan Edwards came to Portsmouth to preach his ordination sermon. Samuel Haven followed Strong in 1752 and remained until 1805. Thayer calls Haven "the erudite and liberal pastor of South parish."⁵⁴

The ministers at New Castle, while lacking the prestige of their brethren on the mainland, were equally as well prepared. They were all college graduates, all but one being from Harvard. The exception was Oliver Noble, Yale, 1757.⁵⁵

Thayer gives some interesting statistics for the New Hampshire ministry in general for this period. Forty-eight of the fifty-two settled ministers in the colony in 1764 were college graduates and nine-tenths of the 199 ministers who served in the colony from 1748 to 1800 were likewise college graduates. Not only were the clergy highly trained, but they were settled for long periods of time. The average pastorate of the period from 1750 to 1800 was twenty-five years and sixteen pastors held the same office for forty-five years or more.⁵⁶ In the light of the above, it is no wonder that Randall, when he heard that Whitefield was coming, remarked:

Oh how disgusting to me was the news of his arrival; for I was much opposed to all travelling preachings, who in those days, by way of derision, were called Newlights; and in short, to all, except the settled congregational clergy, and to every-
thing but form. . . .⁵⁷

⁵² Alden, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁵³ Langdon was the author of twelve theological works, including one on the Hopkinsians and the recipient of a Doctor of Divinity degree from the University of Aberdeen.

⁵⁴ Thayer, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁵⁵ Lawrence, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-97.

⁵⁶ Thayer, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

⁵⁷ Buzzell, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

In spite of their training and standing in the community, the influence of the clergy was not in direct proportion to their position. Following the Revolution the state of morals declined sadly and scepticism and infidelity from abroad increased in New Hampshire as elsewhere.⁵⁸ During the years of Shurtleff's ministry, fifteen in all, there was only one case of church discipline. Evidently the people attended church in good numbers, but they did not devote themselves to their religion with any degree of earnestness. Lawrence made the very apt remark :

Politics and pleasure divided the breasts of the people and very little room was left for the exercise of that holy living required by the elevated standard of Buckminster's theology.⁵⁹

One of the greatest faults of the people was intemperance. This habit had fixed itself on all classes of people, the ministry included, and ordination services were often seasons of copious drinking.⁶⁰ This sin deadened the churches and caused real concern among the godly. The editors of the 1799 edition of the Prayer Book were obviously justified in prefacing their edition with these words: "With sensible concern we observe the declining state of practical religion, the prevalence of error . . . and the consequent neglect of duties of piety, justice, mercy and truth."⁶¹

The prevalence of religious indifference in and around Portsmouth about this time led Whitefield to say of his first visit to the city: "I was given a polite auditory, but so very unconcerned that I began to question whether I had been

⁵⁸ French deism was in part responsible for the anti-clerical feeling. H. M. Morais, *Deism in Eighteenth Century America* (New York, 1934), p. 99, says: "To the advocates of Liberalism it seemed obvious that liberty meant freedom not only from English but ecclesiastical interference." The extent of the penetration of deism into the colleges is well portrayed in H. M. Jones, *American and French Culture 1750-1848* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1927), pp. 378-380. A more detailed treatment of deism is to be found in G. A. Koch, *Republican Religion: the American Revolution and the Cult of Reason* (New York, 1933).

⁵⁹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 121-122.

⁶⁰ Thayer, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁶¹ Quoted by Thayer, *The Religious Condition of New Hampshire at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century* (Portsmouth, 1901?), p. 26.

speaking to rational or brute creatures."⁶² During his second visit to Portsmouth Whitefield wrote a letter to a friend in Boston. In it he spoke as follows: "By this time I thought to be moving southward. But never was greater importunity used to detain me in these parts. Poor New England is much to be pitied. . . ."⁶³

This spiritual decline taken altogether led to an opening wedge into the Portsmouth ecclesiastical scene. This came in 1757 when a number of people withdrew from the two established Congregational churches and formed a third Congregational society. They gave as their reason that the Cambridge Platform ought to be followed for church government as well as the New England Confession of Faith for doctrine.⁶⁴ Thayer calls these people "strict . . . in humble circumstances . . . warm hearted and spiritually minded."⁶⁵ The ministers of this group were not educated, but were "principally distinguished by an honest sincerity and zeal in the Redeemer's cause."⁶⁶ Their second minister, Mr. Walton, was one of their ruling elders who, without formal education and when the church was without a minister, expounded the Scripture to the congregation. This exposition was so acceptable that he was given an invitation to become the pastor and was ordained in 1789.⁶⁷ Perhaps Thayer's acute observation on the clergy is more weighty in the light of this above-mentioned group. He says: "It may be that this same careful training made the regular ministers less able to reach that large number of people, who, at the end of the century, heard the itinerant sectarian preachers gladly."⁶⁸

All of these conditions seem to give the reason for the opposition to Randall when he, as a sailmaker and tailor, began to preach. On the other hand, do not these same

⁶² Quoted by Thayer, *Religious Conditions . . . 1750 to 1800*, p. 12.

⁶³ John Gillies (ed.), *Memoirs of George Whitefield* (Rev. ed., Middletown, Conn., 1839), p. 209.

⁶⁴ Alden, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁶⁵ Thayer, *Religious Conditions . . . Nineteenth Century*, p. 12.

⁶⁶ Alden, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁶⁸ Thayer, *Religious Conditions . . . 1750 to 1800*, p. 10.

circumstances also account for the reception that the common people gave Randall? May it not be said of this man and his later followers that they fulfilled a social as well as a theological need of the day? It would seem that their success, at least in part, is to be found in this direction.⁶⁹

RANDALL'S YEARS IN NEW DURHAM 1778-1780

Frontier Life and the Migration. After the fall of Montreal in 1760 during the Seven Years' War, new people pushed up the Merrimac and Connecticut river valleys and in this migration came the settlers to the "Great Lake," now called Winnepesaukee.⁷⁰ Some of these settlers came from Massachusetts but by far the larger number was from Connecticut. The Great Awakening had been especially felt among many of them for in Connecticut they had been under the influence of Edwards' theology and Whitefield's preaching. When they moved north, they transplanted their doctrinal beliefs and revival spirit with them. This insured the early establishment of religious institutions in even the smallest areas and accounts for the fact that the town of New Durham, incorporated in 1762 and having only 286 people in 1774, called Benjamin Randall to be their pastor in 1778.⁷¹ Having been conditioned for New Light preachers, the frontiersmen offered no antagonism to the extemporary sermonizing of Randall. Even though they had been accustomed to a better trained ministry farther south, the frontier conditions did not offer such educational advantages and any preaching of a revivalistic type was better than none at all.

The most pertinent and valuable description of this frontier

⁶⁹ This observation is supported by the number of churches formed in Portsmouth during this period. The Universalists came in 1780; the Sandemanians in 1764, and the Christian Connection, led by Elias Smith, in 1802.

⁷⁰ J. T. Adams, *Revolutionary New England* (Boston, 1923), p. 259, says: "It is estimated that between 1760 and 1774 39,000 persons emigrated from Connecticut alone and in the same period one hundred new towns were planted in New Hampshire." Adams's figures are based on L. K. Mathews, *Expansion of New England* (Boston, 1909), p. 113.

⁷¹ The population statistics are taken from Lawrence, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

area into which Randall moved in 1778 is by Timothy Dwight who went into New Hampshire and Maine on several occasions. Speaking of the frontiersmen Dwight said:

The business of these men is no other than to cut down trees, build log houses, lay open forested groups to cultivation and prepare the way for those who come after them. These men cannot live in regular society. . . . They are impatient of law, religion and morality. . . . At the same time they are possessed in their own view of uncommon wisdom.⁷²

Not quite so near the raw frontier, but in the settlements close by, Dwight spoke of the country as "considerably improved since my last visit."⁷³ The lands around Dover and Gilmanton were excellent for general farming and the area of Wolfeboro, being close to the lake, was extremely well suited for the growing of fruits such as apples and pears. Dwight, by the time of his second visit to the Great Lake, was obliged to observe that the area was "principally inhabited by Baptists, of the class vulgarly called Free-Willers, who are generally extremely ignorant."⁷⁴

Thus Randall in 1778 moved into the frontier, a growing area, one that was peculiarly receptive to his preaching. If Gabriel is correct in saying that "religion on the frontier became from the beginning the full responsibility of the common people organized into voluntary organizations,"⁷⁵ then the frontier area was the ideal place for Randall to start with

⁷² Quoted by Ralph Henry Gabriel, "Evangelical Religion and Popular Romanticism in Early Eighteenth Century America," *Church History*, XIX (1950), 36.

⁷³ Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New England and New York* (New Haven, 1822), IV, 149. The rapid growth of this whole area at this time may be seen from the Gilmanton statistics. Gilmanton was the closest place to New Durham that Dwight ever visited. In 1775 it had 775 settlers; in 1790, 2,613; in 1800, 3,672; in 1810, 4,388. This is all the more significant when it is remembered that Portsmouth had only 5,339 in 1800 and yet was one of the twelve largest cities in the United States. See Thayer, *Religious Conditions . . . Nineteenth Century*, p. 4.

⁷⁴ *Op. cit.*, IV, 150. See also George Pierce Baker, "New Hampshire Frontier 1760-1795" (unpublished honours thesis, Department of History, Harvard University, 1953) for a description of the geographical and social features of the frontier. It also contains helpful maps with information as to the dates of settlements of townships.

⁷⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 37.

his distinctive doctrines. It was also the place to grow, for as Gabriel says again, "The people of the back country, selecting what they could understand of the Christian tradition, turned that tradition to their own purposes."⁷⁶ This would seem to be exactly what the Freewill Baptists did out on the frontier. Assuming the responsibility for a church, the people in New Durham called Randall; then taking what they could understand, the free will of man as they saw it on the frontier, they became in two years, in 1780, the first Freewill Baptist church.

Emergence of Randall as a Freewill Baptist. At the time he came to this new frontier area of a few hundred souls,⁷⁷ Randall was not aware that the concept he had of a salvation available to all was in conflict with the prevailing theology among the Baptists. His biographer makes this abundantly clear in the following words:

Here I would just remark, that from the time of Mr. Randall's baptism to this time, nothing had transpired or taken place, to cause any division or disunion among the Baptist brethren of New England. All were in love and union. All were in harmony; unanimity pervaded the whole. Mr. Randall to be sure, was of general sentiments and did not know but that it was the case with all his brethren. . . . Nothing had been said about Calvinism or Arminianism.⁷⁸

While this was true when Randall first went to New Durham, the actual situation soon became evident. Randall said himself :

. . . as the Lord had shewed me an universal atonement and fulness enough in Christ for all men—the appearance of grace to all men—that the call of God was to all, and that God was not willing that any should perish—that same

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ There had been a Congregational church in New Durham, but for three years prior to 1778 it had been without a minister. As far as we know, Randall sustained no relationship to it whatsoever. I. D. Stewart, *The History of the Freewill Baptists* (Dover, 1862), p. 44.

⁷⁸ Buzzell, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-75.

love constrained me to go forth and call upon all men to come to Christ and be saved.⁷⁹

When Randall went forth to proclaim this Arminian doctrine, though he did not call it by that name, he was soon in an embarrassing position. The first public notice of his predicament was when one of his brothers called upon him to tell why he did not preach election as "Mr. Calvin held it." Randall's answer was very simple and unequivocal: "Because I do not believe it."⁸⁰ This was only the first of many disputes which led Randall to a deeper study of the issues involved. What theology he had read prior to this time we cannot know now except that it certainly centred in the Scriptures.⁸¹

Finally the controversy elicited a call for a meeting at the Calvinistic Baptist meeting house in Gilmanton, not far from New Durham, in July 1779.⁸² All that we know of this meeting is what Buzzell has preserved for us.⁸³ It lasted the greater part of two days and at the close the minister who had been the principal in the debate⁸⁴ made the following public declaration: "I have no fellowship with brother Randall, in his principles."⁸⁵ Randall's reply was equally concise: "It makes no odds with me, who disowns me, as long as I know that the Lord owns me."⁸⁶

This debate with Randall in Gilmanton in July 1779 was not the only public gathering to be held on the subject of Calvinism. The next significant step was to be taken that fall. Edward Lock, a member of the Gilmanton church since

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Religious Magazine*, I (1811), 2, says that Randall objected to the whole doctrine of Calvin with respect to eternal, particular, personal, unconditional election and reprobation. He had come to this position, so the *Magazine* says, by a reading of the Bible for himself, and in the process had become convinced that the ways of God are all equal. *Ibid.*, p. 1. This is a good example of what W. W. Sweet calls "the levelling power of the frontier." *American Culture and Religion* (Dallas, 1951), p. 107. In a funeral sermon preached in 1803, the only printed material we have from his pen, Randall said in the section "To the Reader" that those who read what he says "will compare it with the Scriptures, which is the unerring standard and before which all doctrine, ideas and traditions of men will one day fall. . . ."

⁸² Backus, *op. cit.*, II, 536, lists this Gilmanton church as being formed

1775, had been licensed to preach in 1777 by that church. He centred his preaching in the Loudon-Canterbury area where he first organized and then pastored a church which had been started informally by Samuel Shepard. Some time during 1779 he made known to his fellow members in the Gilmanton church that he no longer agreed with certain of the Articles of Faith which were decidedly Calvinistic.⁸⁷ His views provoked another conference in the Gilmanton church, this time on December 4, 1779, and at this meeting he asserted that "he had not fellowship with the Body and could not travel with them." Lock then asked for a letter of dismissal to his own church at Loudon but his request was denied, along with the similar petitions of several other members at Gilmanton.⁸⁸

The next development was the third Gilmanton council held on February 11, 1789, convened to consider Lock's inopportune request for ordination. William Hooper, pastor of the Berwick, Maine, church and the one who had immersed Randall, was the moderator of the meeting. Representa-

in 1772. For a good expression of the Baptist understanding of Calvinism at this period see Backus's own works entitled *The Doctrine of Particular Election and Final Perseverance Explained and Vindicated* (Boston, 1789) and *The Sovereign Decrees of God Set in a Scriptural Light* (Boston, 1773).

⁸³ The records of the Gilmanton church make no mention of this meeting held in their building with Randall present.

⁸⁴ Otherwise unidentified.

⁸⁵ Buzzell, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Ebenezer Cummings, *A Sermon Preached before the New Hampshire Baptist State Convention* (Concord, 1836), p. 9. The Articles of Faith are contained in the Records of the Baptist Church of Christ in Gilman-ton, a manuscript volume in the New Hampshire Historical Society. As an illustration of their doctrinal position Article III may be cited: "All the elect were personally chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, according to Ephesians 1: 1-4." Records, p. 3.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4. J. O. Lyford, *History of the Town of Canterbury, New Hampshire 1727-1912* (Concord, 1912), I, 317, says that Randall also appeared before the Gilmanton church in December 1779. It is not clear that he was at this particular council, for the Gilmanton records are silent on his appearance. However, it would only be natural for him to attend, if possible, an examination of one with whom he concurred doctrinally.

tives were also present from the Baptist church in Barrington, New Hampshire. Before proceeding to the matter at hand the council first "examined the evidence respecting the charge against Elder Lock respecting his opposing the doctrine of regeneration by sovereign grace."⁸⁹ The council agreed that Lock and a group of nine others "held that men have power in themselves by the grace common to all men to believe and love the gospel."⁹⁰ Thereupon they refused to entertain Lock's request for ordination and promptly withdrew fellowship from him and his nine sympathizers. They proudly announced that "Mr. Lock has departed from the true faith and ought to confess his error and return."⁹¹

But the story is not complete. At this same council one of the representatives from the above-named Barrington church was Tozier Lord. Lord had been ordained a regular Baptist minister by the Lebanon church in October 1776 by Samuel Shepard and others. When the Gilmanton council pronounced Lock as holding sentiments opposed to the Articles of Faith, Lord said: "If you withdraw fellowship from Mr. Lock, you do from me also, for I am of the same belief."⁹² His disfellowshipping promptly followed.

Thus it is evident that Randall, in the crucial years 1778-1780, had some theological kin.⁹³ Lord, soon after the council's refusal to ordain Lock, ordained him himself. The two of them then ordained John Shepard, a nephew of the Baptist physician and lay preacher, as a ruling elder. John Shepard had left the Gilmanton church the same time as Lock and for the same reason. These three men then united in the ordination of Randall on April 5, 1780. Lord preached the sermon and gave the charge; Lock gave the hand of

⁸⁹ Records of the Baptist Church of Christ in Gilmanton, p. 3.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁹¹ Daniel Lancaster, *The History of Gilmanton* (Gilmanton, N. H., 1845), p. 200.

⁹² Amasa Loring, *History of Shapleigh* (Portland, 1854), p. 31. Loring says that he had this account from the lips of John Shepard, who was present that day.

⁹³ Buzzell, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

fellowship and Ruling Elder Shepard took some part now unknown to us.

In addition to the members of the Loudon-Canterbury church and the ones at Barrington, Randall had a similarly-minded group of his own at New Durham. This group embodied themselves into a church on June 30, 1780. They had a covenant and Articles of Faith.⁹⁴

This New Durham church is usually considered the first Freewill Baptist church. Actually the Loudon-Canterbury and Barrington churches, which preached the same Gospel, preceded it in point of time. However, these churches were independent and never sustained any relation to the Freewill Baptists. Also by 1782 they had lost their visibility. Thus the New Durham church was the first church of "free sentiments" to maintain a continuous existence in affiliation with the Freewill Baptists and the history of the movement turns around that church as the hub of the movement with the various spokes radiating out from it. That radiation and growth is another chapter in this study.

⁹⁴ The covenant is reprinted from the church records in Buzzell, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-84. Buzzell refers the reader to the records for the Articles of Faith, but the first page of the records, which presumably contained the Articles, is missing.

CHAPTER II

THE STABILIZING PERIOD 1780-1827

EXTERNAL HISTORY

Growth. The formal history of the Freewill Baptists began when the group of believers, led by Randall,¹ signed the covenant on June 30, 1780, which embodied them into the first Freewill Baptist church. This vine, so planted, ran over the wall quickly. Randall, true to his call, was not a man of any one people, but travelled far in the interests of the cause. But, before he undertook these missionary labours, he was prepared for them by a climactic religious experience which was subsequent to his conversion and call to preach. This is commonly referred to as the "cornfield experience" because of its physical setting. Randall had been labouring under distress in his own mind as to the meaning of certain passages of Scripture which had been hurled at him by his Calvinistic opponents. Three of these were particularly prominent, Romans 8:29, 9:13, and Ephesians 1:4. In the spring of 1780 his distress increased, but it was not until July 1780 that the light came. He had read all that he could find to read on the subject, including the Bible, and one day in July, in a remote part of the cornfield where he had been working, Randall sat down and cried out to the Lord: "Why may I not be taught?" The answer was to the effect that he had been clinging to too many traditions of men. The vision continued.

¹ In 1779 Randall requested dismission from the Berwick, Maine, church so that he could unite with the Barrington church led by Tozier Lord. His application was never granted, however, so that he joined the Barrington church in March 1780 on profession of faith. This membership ended when he became a member of the New Durham church.—*Morning Star*, November 16, 1859.

Randall then recognized his need for surrendering himself to the Lord and he did so with these words: "Lord, here I am, take me and do with me as thou wilt." With this surrender came a new comprehension of the majesty of God which dwarfed Randall. After he had been thus overwhelmed a Bible was brought with an attendant voice admonishing him to look within. Randall subsequently recalled the inspiration of this momentous encounter in the following words:

I saw all the Scriptures in perfect harmony; and those texts, about which my opposers were contending, were all opened to my mind; and I saw that they ran in perfect connection with the universal love of God to men—the universal atonement in the work of redemption by Jesus Christ,—who tasted death for every man—the universal appearance of grace to all men and with the universal call of the gospel; and glory to God! my soul has never been in any trials about the meaning of those scriptures since.²

The vision faded and Randall was left sitting on a rock, perspiring freely and weak from all that had taken place in the last hour and a half.

Shortly after this experience Randall left on his first trip into Maine, visiting several towns on the Saco River. The first town where he sojourned was Littlefalls, now called Hollis.³ Success attended Randall's preaching efforts there, and a church was organized. He went on to Gorham, Maine, and preached there, but no concrete results followed. No other churches were gathered on this first trip into Maine. Back home again, a congregation was established the following February in Tamworth, New Hampshire, and still another that same year, 1781, in Strafford. Within a year after the organization of the New Durham church, that is by June 1781, there were Freewill Baptist congregations in Tamworth, New Durham, Strafford, all in New Hampshire, and Hollis and Acton in Maine.⁴

² John Buzzell, *The Life of Elder Benjamin Randal* (Limerick, Maine, 1827), p. 89.

³ Transitionally called Phillipsburg.

⁴ The Acton, Maine, church was formed by Tozier Lord, who had moved from Barrington to Acton. Amasa Loring, *History of Shapleigh* (Portland, 1854), p. 31.

A year from the time of his first visit Randall went again to Maine, this time going as far as the Kennebunk River. The first meeting of this trip was on Parker's Island, now Georgetown, where a reformation followed his preaching and a congregation was embodied a short while later. From Georgetown Randall went up the river to Woolwich, where a congregation was formed after a week of meetings. The work of revival spread and other churches were formed on this same trip at Westport, Bristol, and Edgecomb. This trip of 490 miles and 37 days was highly profitable, for it laid the foundation for what was to become the Edgecomb Quarterly Meeting. Still that fall congregations were formed in Scarborough and Gorham, Maine. By the close of 1781 there were fourteen churches in New Hampshire and Maine.⁵

The first few months of the next year Randall remained at home because of the sickness and subsequent death of his father-in-law, Captain Oram, who had made his home with Randall. But in the latter part of the year Randall went again to his new "vineyard," where officers were ordained and the work in general made good progress.

The Canterbury defection⁶ in 1783 and his own illness kept Randall at home for the first part of that year, but he made his annual visit to Maine that fall. He found the work going forward and was encouraged thereby to continue eastward to New Castle and the most distant part of Bristol township. On his way home he preached at Brunswick and then stopped at Harpswell where he exhorted for several days. Before returning to New Durham, he stayed at Hollis where he attended the first Quarterly Meeting of the Freewill Baptists.⁷ This tour lasted nearly two months.

The next year, 1784, Randall spent largely in visiting the churches of the newly-established Quarterly Meeting, travel-

⁵ I. D. Stewart, *History of the Freewill Baptists* (Dover, 1862), p. 64.

⁶ See below, pp. 61-64, for an account of the Shakers and their relation to the Freewill Baptists.

⁷ The organization of the Quarterly Meeting is discussed below, pp. 42-47.

ling nearly 1,000 miles. His time was increasingly occupied with ordinations and ecclesiastical difficulties of one sort or another. Each year his travels lengthened and in 1785 they totalled 1,200 miles. The years 1785 and 1786 were along the same pattern as the previous ones; ordinations, travels, visitations, and the establishment of new congregations.⁸

From 1786 until 1792 the Freewill Baptist cause deteriorated considerably. Buzzell called it "the most dark and trying time that ever these people experienced."⁹ The records of the New Durham church offer abundant support for this characterization. There were numerous appeals to the people at New Durham for "aid in settling some difficulties." Part of the trouble stemmed from the Calvinistic Baptists who organized the New Hampshire Association in 1785.¹⁰ This group immediately set out to correct certain churches on the matter of doctrine. The Sandwich, New Hampshire, church, for example, was rebuked for laxity in the preaching of election.¹¹ Another and more influential factor in the decline was the erosion of the work at New Durham. There the situation gradually worsened until, in March 1791, it was decided that the ungodly conduct of backsliders was so blasphemous that the church was no longer a church in "visible standing." At that meeting, March 9, 1791, they voted to make a public declaration that they were no longer a church and this was done on April 3. On April 9 the new covenant¹² was sub-

⁸ The following description of Randall as he appeared in his garb for travelling is given in the *Morning Star*, January 12, 1860. "In winter his slender form [was] wrapped in a cloak great-coat of dark blue home made cloth, uniquely fashioned by his own invention and skill with a kind of wing sleeves, protecting his arms and doubly shielding his breast; a bandana, or a home knit comforter [was] around his collar and chin; below the plain, low crowned and widebrimmed hat, [he wore] woolen mittens and substantial boots."

⁹ *Religious Magazine*, I (1811), 60.

¹⁰ Ebenezer Cummings, *A Sermon Preached before the New Hampshire Baptist State Convention* (Concord, 1836), p. 10.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² This second covenant of the New Durham church is in the New Durham Church Records, April 13, 1791. It differed from the 1780 covenant in its inclusion of more specific obligations of the members one towards the other. There were eleven items which explicated the "ordinances and commands." The covenant may be found in an abridged form in Stewart, *History*, p. 110.

scribed and a revival followed. The record states that at the very next communion service, they experienced the "greatest degree of union and uniformity that ever appeared in this place."¹³ That June Randall baptized a total of sixteen, among them John Buzzell, and at the next communion every member of the newly reconstituted church gave an account of his state of religion.

This revival in the New Durham church spread throughout the denomination and was largely responsible for saving the Freewill Baptist movement from extinction. As it was, the revival prepared the way for the years of greater expansion. In the years down to 1792 a total of eighteen churches had been organized. In the next eight years alone a total of thirty-three new churches came into being, making a total of fifty-one by 1800. In the next decade the number of new churches was forty-nine, so that by 1810, or just two years after Randall's death, the denomination boasted 100 churches.¹⁴ The increase was centred largely in Maine and New Hampshire with only two churches being established in Vermont prior to 1810.

Randall's death in 1808 left the new movement without an acknowledged leader. This in itself was a great handicap but it was not the only adversity. A series of cold winters from 1814 to 1816 and the shortened growing seasons added to the miseries of the frontier people. Food was scarce and commodities in general were priced out of the reach of the Freewill Baptists who in the main were poor people.¹⁵

In addition to these difficulties an epidemic of smallpox swept through New England between 1813 and 1816. As the Pittsfield church reported to the Quarterly Meeting, it was a "sick and dying time."¹⁶ The fever prevented any large religious meetings for the people wanted to avoid contagion.

¹³ New Durham Church Records, *loc. cit.*

¹⁴ Stewart, *History*, pp. 173, 233, 252.

¹⁵ Jonathan Fisher, a Congregational pastor in Blue Hill, Maine, at this time wrote: "Hunger prevails in some sections of our district. A woman and two children have died of it in Frankfort. Our own bread allowance is but one third of our usual supply. . . ." Quoted by M. E. Chase, *Jonathan Fisher, Maine Parson* (New York, 1948), p. 237.

¹⁶ Quoted by Stewart, *History*, p. 347.

Further, many congregations lost valuable members by death during the season of the epidemic and the attention of the members as well as of the ministers was diverted to physical care and well being.¹⁷

In spite of the distress at home, i.e. in New Hampshire, this decade saw the inception of a missionary movement which was heretofore unparalleled in Freewill Baptist history. At least twenty-eight churches were organized in Maine during this period,¹⁸ largely due to the revival efforts of Ephraim Stinchfield and a new school teacher convert, Clement Phinney.¹⁹ The movement spread westward into Vermont, due to the labours there of John Colby.²⁰ He succeeded in establishing churches in that State, after which he went south to Rhode Island where he established the church at Burrillville, the only Freewill Baptist church in that State until 1818 when a revival broke out there under Clarissa Danforth.

The next stage of expansion was outside New England, into New York and Ohio. The Reverend Nathan Brown of Strafford, Vermont, was the forerunner of the movement into Genesee county in western New York and from small beginnings, Brown, aided by Reverends Herman Jenkins and Rufus Cheney, spread the Freewill Baptist Gospel throughout western New York.²¹

Colby, when not engaged in Vermont or Rhode Island, made the pioneer trek into Ohio, spending two months in that territory. His work was later implemented by Reverend Eli Stedman. A Yearly Meeting was organized after these men laboured there, but it went over almost entirely to the Christians in 1819.²²

The closing years of the decade from 1810 to 1820 saw

¹⁷ Edward Channing, *A History of the United States* (6 vols.; New York, 1905-1925), IV, 22, speaks of the ravages of this disease. The vaccination process discovered in 1799 spread very slowly and by 1813-1816 it was not yet used on the frontier of northern New England.

¹⁸ Stewart, *History*, p. 347.

¹⁹ See D. M. Graham, *Life of Clement Phinney* (Dover, 1851).

²⁰ See John Colby, *The Life . . . of John Colby . . .* (Andover, N.H., 1819).

²¹ Stewart, *History*, p. 325.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 343.

revivals in most of the Freewill Baptist churches in New England. This meant a rapid increase in members and churches. From the estimated 100 churches in 1810, there were about 185 by 1820, and by 1827, the total had grown to 304.²³ From the estimated 3,500 members in 1810 the ranks had swollen to approximately 9,000 by 1820, but by 1827, the pinnacle of 18,000 had been reached.²⁴ This rather phenomenal growth made new plans and organizations imperative and as a result the General Conference was organized in 1827. That event marks an epoch in Freewill Baptist history and is therefore a convenient breaking point in this study.

Causes of This Growth. A growth of this proportion cannot be accepted casually. Some attempt must be made to account for it. One very obvious answer is that the Freewill Baptists were in an area where the population was increasing rapidly. From 141,885 in 1790, New Hampshire had grown to 260,533 by 1830.²⁵ Maine underwent an even greater growth, rising from 96,540 in 1790 to 398,255 in 1830.²⁶ These increases were concentrated on the frontier where Randall and his helpers were the most active.

Some of the significance of this increase among the Freewill Baptists is lessened when it is compared to the increments among other denominations in the area. The comparison with the theologically congruous Methodists is fairly easy to make for they began at approximately the same time in northern New England.²⁷ Seventeen-ninety-four was the first year in

²³ J. M. Brewster, *et al.*, *Centennial Record of Freewill Baptists* (Dover, 1880), p. 239.

²⁴ Stewart, *History*, p. 325.

²⁵ United States Bureau of the Census, *Heads of Families at the first census of the United States taken in the year 1790 . . .* (12 vols., Washington, 1907-1908), I, 3; United States Census Office: *Fifth Census . . .* (Washington, 1832), p. 15.

²⁶ *Census, 1790*, p. 3; *Census, 1830*, p. 8.

²⁷ O. S. Baketel and Otis Cole, *History of New Hampshire Conference* (New York, 1929), p. 23, say that probably the first Methodist sermon was preached in Chesterfield in 1772. This was not an enduring witness, however. William Black preached in Boston and vicinity in 1784. John Atkinson, *Centennial History of American Methodism* (New York, 1884), p. 333. But the formal and permanent witness of the Methodists in

which a New Hampshire town was on the list of conference appointments.²⁸ By 1797 there were ninety-two Methodists in New Hampshire.²⁹ This number grew to 5,350 in the State in 1827.³⁰ The Methodist growth in Maine is likewise impressive. From 357 in 1796, they increased to 8,248 in 1827.³¹

Though they started formally ten years later than the Free-will Baptists, the Methodists had succeeded in making nearly 14,000 converts in the two states while the Free-will Baptists had gathered 18,000 in the longer period and some of those were outside of Maine and New Hampshire.

The growth of these two Arminian bodies, Free-will Baptists and Methodists, has been explained by some as due in large part to the essential congruity between the Arminian doctrine of the freedom of the will and the rugged individualism inherent in frontier life.³² This explanation of the surpassing

New England came with the appointment of Jesse Lee to the area in 1789. G. C. Baker, *An Introduction to the History of Early New England Methodism, 1789-1839* (Durham, N.C., 1941), p. 7. Thus, in 1790, the Methodists could say that "all the eastern and northern sections of New England were yet unentered." James Mudge, *History of New England Conference* (Boston, 1910), p. 32.

²⁸ Baketel and Cole, *op. cit.*, p. 27. The town was Chesterfield.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³⁰ *Minutes of the Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Years 1773-1828* (3 vols., New York, 1840), I, 68, 532.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 532.

³² W. W. Sweet, *Methodism in American History* (New York, 1938), p. 149, takes this position. Wesley Gewehr, "Some Factors in the Expansion of Frontier Methodism," *Journal of Religion*, VIII (1928), 98-120, does also. Maurice Armstrong, "Religious Enthusiasm and Separatism in Colonial New England," *Harvard Theological Review*, XXXVIII (1945), pp. 111-140, advances a slight variation of this theme when he says that the onrush to frontier areas helped the cause of enthusiasm in New England while at the same time it led to the decline of Calvinism. His words are: ". . . frontier conditions were not the most encouraging to the 'elect' and 'reprobate' of Calvinism. The danger, the isolation from restraint, and the opportunities for success bred self reliance and a spirit of independence which did not fit in with the code of the standing order. . . . The whole teaching of Calvinistic theology began to be doubted and questioned . . . because of the practical social situation on the frontier." *Ibid.*, p. 122. Armstrong concludes by saying that Arminianism was "an indigenous growth, the expression of the demand of a hard-working, heavy-drinking and self-reliant people for a religion more adapted to their lives." *Ibid.*, p. 138.

progress of Arminian groups may be tested by comparing their growth with that of Calvinistic bodies in the same area for the coinciding period.

Here the comparison is a bit more difficult to make, although it is still possible. Take the Calvinistic Baptists first. They had their first continuing impetus in Maine and New Hampshire under the ministry of Hezekiah Smith of Haverhill in 1767 to 1770. By 1790 there were 1,732 members in New Hampshire and 822 in Maine. These churches grew until by 1810 the total in both States was 10,235.³³ This is nearly three times the estimated 3,500 the Freewill Baptists had that same year! By 1827 there were 12,120 Calvinistic Baptists in just Maine, or roughly two-thirds of the total Freewill Baptists in all States.³⁴ There are no corresponding figures available for 1827 in New Hampshire.

The comparison between the Freewill Baptist growth and that of the Congregationalists-Presbyterians is still more difficult because of the complete lack of data for the latter before 1816. Bouton says that in 1809, when the General Association of New Hampshire was organized, there had been no "numbering of Israel" prior to that time.³⁵ He conjectures that the membership of Congregational and Presbyterian churches could not have exceeded 6,500 that year.³⁶ This estimate is in line with the statistics of the New Hampshire Missionary Society's report of 1852. They listed 7,960 communicants in the State in 1816.³⁷ By 1827, this total had increased to 12,767.³⁸ The number of orthodox churches in New Hampshire in 1780 was 114, but by 1827 this number

³³ A. H. Newman, *A History of Baptist Churches in the United States* (New York, 1894), pp. 268, 271.

³⁴ H. S. Burrage, *History of Baptists in Maine* (Portland, 1904), p. 480.

³⁵ Nathaniel Bouton, *Commemorative Discourse* (Concord, 1859), p. 47.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Fifty-First Annual Report of the New Hampshire Missionary Society* (Concord, 1852), p. 29. This document states that 1816 was the first year statistics were published and that they were a "sufficient approximation of the truth for all practical purposes." p. 10.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

had swollen to 177.³⁹ There are no figures at all available for Maine.⁴⁰

It is readily apparent that while the Presbyterian-Congregational growth in New Hampshire was substantial, it was not as great, proportionately, as the increase of either the Freewill or Calvinistic Baptists, or Methodists. However, enough growth occurred among Calvinistic groups to belie the thesis that the Arminians far outstripped the Calvinists on the frontier because the preaching of "whosoever will" harmonized more readily with the frontier social order, or lack of it.

There are other essential factors which account for the religious growth on the frontier. One basic reason was that any religious group entering frontier country in Maine or New Hampshire in this period found a wide open field. There were settlers, widely dispersed, but few, if any, churches. Some idea of this religious desolation may be seen in a letter written by General Benjamin Lincoln in 1790 in which he said: "Very few of the children born in that country are baptized, nor has the Lord's Supper ever been administered in most of the towns and plantations below the Penobscot."⁴¹

There are numerous other indications of the religious institutional vacuum of the frontier area. Edmund Eastman, in his report to the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, said that he was the first missionary to visit the area around Houlton and that some of the settlers had been there four years without being able to attend a meeting.⁴² Jotham Sewall, in his report to the same body on his visit to Kennebec County, said: "Many settlements in the upper part of the those counties are very destitute of preaching."⁴³ He reported that one man rode twelve miles by night in order to hear one sermon, so hungry was he for preach-

³⁹ H. A. Hazen, *The Congregational and Presbyterian Ministry and Churches of New Hampshire* (Boston, 1875), p. 66.

⁴⁰ C. M. Clark, *History of Congregational Churches in Maine* (2 vols., Portland, 1926-1935), II, 240, note one, says that he could not give statistics for that state because reading the records of one hundred churches was personally impossible. He did not find statistics of a reliable nature that he could use.

ing.⁴⁴ Missionaries sent out by the Maine Missionary Society reported in 1821 that their services were "still very disproportionate to the numerous wants of the destitute."⁴⁵ All of the returns of missionaries sent into the frontier areas glow with accounts of their reception by Gospel hungry settlers. One example will suffice. John Sawyer, reporting in 1800, said: "I was kindly received but felt great inconvenience from the great disparity between the time I had to spend and the great extent of new settlements."⁴⁶ Thus one of the basic reasons for the growth of any religious movement on the frontier was that there was room for all; the area was destitute, religiously speaking. Any group that moved north found ears anxious to hear the Gospel.

Although this lacuna in the north accounts for general religious reception and growth, it doesn't provide for the discrepancy in growth between the two groups of Baptists and the Congregational-Presbyterian churches. When it came to appealing to the same groups of people and entering into competition with each other as was the case in southern New Hampshire the Baptists prevailed. Why? The answer to this lies in the nature of frontier society.

The frontiersmen were apt to be those who had been discontented in the more settled areas and had gone north or west to remedy their lot in life. Some of this unrest was due to religious conditions.⁴⁷ The frontier, with its lure of cheap land and the possibility of large returns, appealed to

⁴⁴ "Religious State of the Eastern Counties in the District of Maine," *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* (1st series, 1795), IV, 153-156.

⁴⁵ *An Account of the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge* (Andover, Mass., 1815), p. 22.

⁴⁶ *Seventh Report of the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge* (Andover, Mass., 1806), p. 20.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Report of the Maine Missionary Society* (Portland, 1821), p. 28.

⁴⁹ *Report of the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge* (Andover, Mass., 1800), p. 9.

⁵⁰ For an excellent study of the contrast in economic conditions between the frontier and conservative areas along the coast and the effect that this discrepancy had on religion see J. C. Miller, "Religion, Finance and Democracy in Massachusetts," *New England Quarterly*, VI (1933), 29-58.

the economically distressed. A sense of social injustice drove these same people into areas where they might rectify some of their sufferings. For this reason many men who were lacking in educational advantages went to the new areas where culture was not as essential. Then, too, many left settled regions because they were religiously persecuted. As Mathews says in summary: "The discontented, the poor, the radical—all such elements—moved to the frontier."⁴⁸

This type of person, having moved to the frontier to escape from unhappy conditions, was not likely to welcome clergymen of the Standing Order because they bespoke one thing to him, namely, the conditions as he had known them. It was for this reason that the missionaries of the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge said that in the areas where the sectaries had settled they were not received in a cordial fashion. John Turner, for example, could write in 1813 that "they stood at a distance from me" or "most of those I have visited appear to have their minds fortified against the truth. . . ."⁴⁹

Part of the dislike for the clergy of the Standing Order and the appeal that the sectaries had on the frontier was due to the economic hardships that the frontiersmen had undergone at the hands of the state church. Timothy Dwight characterized the frontiersmen of northern New England as those who "grumble about the taxes by which the Rulers, Ministers and Schoolmasters are supported. . . ."⁵⁰ If this description is accurate, then the Freewill Baptists were popular for economic reasons. In 1798 they were ordaining a minister in the town of Unity, the first minister of any denomination to be ordained in that town. As such he would have had the legal right to the ministerial land. The town authorities objected to the presentation of the land and they

⁴⁸ L. K. Mathews, *The Expansion of New England* (Boston, 1909), p. 261.

⁴⁹ *Sermon Delivered in Boston Before the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge* (Andover, Mass., 1814), appendix, pp. 29-30.

⁵⁰ Quoted by F. J. Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York, 1945), p. 251. Turner did not give his source in Dwight.

offered the candidate a small present if he would relinquish his legal rights.⁵¹ The candidate was willing to do this, but rather than have any question in the matter, the ordaining council voted to conduct the ordination services on a hill-side just beyond the town limits, thereby automatically eliminating any land claim. This type of thing must have appealed to the frontiersman who was hard pressed financially.

The sectaries grew faster than the orthodox churches for still another reason. The frontier was naturally lacking in educational advantages. The Congregational missionaries to Rockingham and Strafford counties in southern New Hampshire are unanimous in decrying this void. Timothy Hilliard, writing in 1814, said that the one solitary exception to this low level of learning was an "intelligent and polished" mother in Durham who had taught her three children to read, and they read the morning and evening prayer for the missionary.⁵²

The sectarian preachers did not possess the cultural advantages of their brethren of the Standing Order,⁵³ but their lack in this respect was one of the reasons that they were better able to reach the frontiersmen. Their messages were on "the necessity of a change of heart," whereas the Congregational clergy preached chiefly if not exclusively on doctrinal articles. On one occasion Timothy Holt, a Congregational missionary, said that out of regard for the people he preached "more on experimental than doctrinal subjects."⁵⁴ The effect of this kind of preaching was such that John Peak,

⁵¹ Stewart, *History*, p. 155. For the constitutional provisions for ministerial land see Albert Stillman Batchellor (ed.), *Laws of New Hampshire . . . Province Period 1679-1702* (Manchester, 1904), I, 590.

⁵² *An Account*, p. 61. Another missionary in the same area said: "I do not know of one gentleman of liberal education who is an inhabitant in any one of the towns where I have labored . . . excepting one in Durham." *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁵³ David Chapin, in his *Sermon before the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, June 1, 1815* (Andover, Mass., 1815), said: "The principles, conversation, manners, talents and spirit of the missionaries (Congregational) form . . . a contrast to the characters of the sectarians." p. 15.

⁵⁴ *An Account*, p. 51.

who was reared a Congregationalist, could say that he first heard the testimony of a "Christian experience" at the age of twenty-one at a Baptist meeting.⁵⁵

Coming now to account for the growth of the Freewill Baptists in particular, there are special, though not always unique, reasons for that growth. One was the zeal and energy which the early preachers exerted. Randall was absolutely tireless in his devotion to the work. While pastoring a church at home, maintaining his family and his farm, he still spent months travelling into new areas and visiting old ones.⁵⁶ Nor was Randall alone in this work. He had a goodly number of capable co-workers.⁵⁷

The method of the Freewill Baptist preacher was another element in their growth. Randall visited Maine every fall, and in the spring he made a circuit of the New Hampshire churches. In this fashion Randall approximated the itinerant ministry which was so important in establishing the Methodist Church in the trans-Allegheny frontier.⁵⁸ But even more significant than the method of visitation was the type of men who itinerated. They were farmer-preachers, men who did not depend for their support on the people who heard them. They farmed when they couldn't preach and *vice versa*.

⁵⁵ John Peak, *Memoir of Elder John Peak* (Boston, 1832), p. 23. R. L. Rusk, *Literature of the Middle Western Frontier* (2 vols., New York, 1925), I, 46, said: "In general it may be said that . . . Protestant sects succeeded in the Pioneer West in inverse ratio to their intellectual attainments and in direct ratio to their emotional appeal." It would seem that this is a real clue to the success of the sectarians on the New England frontier as well.

⁵⁶ His journal for 1801 stated that he had travelled 2,723 miles and attended 313 public meetings for the year. Buzzell, *op. cit.*, p. 217. It is not to be supposed that only Freewill Baptist preachers were so zealous. The Reverend Jotham Sewall, a missionary for the Maine Missionary Society on a part-time basis, travelled 2,000 miles and preached 256 sermons and made 236 visitations in thirty weeks in 1811. Jotham Sewall, Jr., *A Memoir of Reverend Jotham Sewall* (Boston, 1853), p. 190.

⁵⁷ Among these helpers, mention must be made of John Buzzell, Randall's biographer and constant companion after his baptism by Randall in 1791; Ephraim Stinchfield, who worked largely in the pioneer areas of Maine; Pelatiah Tingley, a graduate of Yale College, 1761, for twenty-four years the clerk of the Yearly Meeting; and Samuel Weeks, who laboured in East Parsonfield, Maine.

⁵⁸ Gewehr, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

It was in this fashion that sparsely settled areas which could not possibly support a settled pastor often heard the travelling Freewill Baptist preacher as he made his rounds. As Sweet gives credit for the success of the Methodists in the west to the "devoted farmer-preacher type of ministry,"⁵⁹ so may we give credit to the comparable men of the Freewill Baptists in New England.

The organization of the Freewill Baptists was also notable in accounting for their growth. The Quarterly Meeting had the power to appoint committees to visit weak and floundering churches. In this way the churches that needed help received it promptly. Also, the Quarterly Meeting voted regular supplies to "bereaved" churches. This helped to prevent disintegration, especially among the smaller congregations. Further, the organization of a local church called for a ruling elder. His function was to see that all the offices of the church were well performed, and this included the office of teaching elder. Thus, when the teaching elder was away on evangelistic tours, the local church was provided for. This allowed the pastor to make frequent and prolonged trips, preaching the Gospel as he went.

Another specific means of propagating Freewill Baptist doctrine was the revival meeting, the eastern adaptation of the western camp meeting. As the camp meeting in the west was "just the thing for the west in supplying the need for association to overcome the monotony and isolation of frontier life,"⁶⁰ so was the revival meeting in the east. With the Freewill Baptists the revival service occurred contemporaneously with the Quarterly or Yearly Meeting. While these were ostensibly for business purposes, they usually were transformed into a regular revival before they were over. The Yearly Meeting held in New Durham in 1798 is typical of such a service and it will be considered here.

During the winter of 1797-1798 much prayer was offered

⁵⁹ W. W. Sweet, *The American Churches, An Interpretation* (London, 1947), p. 38.

⁶⁰ Gewehr, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

at the New Durham church for a revival. People remained on their knees for as long as one and one-half hours at a time.⁶¹ Having thus prepared themselves spiritually, they went to the Yearly Meeting with a heavy sense of solemnity. About one thousand people were at the June meeting,⁶² and though it began by attending to the business at hand, before it had gone far a young man arose to confess his disobedience to God and his parents. Then he gave his testimony before the meeting that God had forgiven him and transformed his life. He followed this with an exhortation to other young people to confess their sins and, with that, an emotional outburst began. Cries were heard all over the meeting; there was some fainting and shouting, all to such an excess that Randall asked the people to desist. When the furore did not decline Randall confessed that he had been at fault in making the request, whereupon the tempo of the cries only increased. By the end of four days the crowd had increased to about 3,000, and the converts of that meeting numbered 100 or more. As Buzzell said: "Scarlet red sinners appeared to become snow white saints."⁶³

This type of meeting served as a focal point for large numbers of conversions, but its importance was not so much in those converted on the scene as the converts made by the converts. In other words, the new "saints" returned home to pass the message of salvation to their neighbours, and in this grape-vine fashion the Freewill Baptist Gospel was trans-

⁶¹ New Durham Church Records, II 46.

⁶² There were no church buildings large enough to seat such crowds, so the Quarterly or Yearly Meetings were usually held in someone's orchard or pasture. The New Durham records are replete with requests to a brother to arrange for a meeting place and also for a pasture for the horses of those who came. The local church people always paid for an area so used.

⁶³ Buzzell, *op. cit.*, p. 175. Buzzell did not elaborate on what he meant by sinners, but since all believers were admitted to the Lord's Supper, it is not likely that he meant non-immersed church members. It is more probable that he meant social sinners, i.e., those who were guilty of dancing, worldliness, vanity, pride and "gaming." It is also true that sinners would include those who cursed, adulterers, and those who cheated in horse trading. See a circular letter of a Quarterly Meeting which condemned such practices as are mentioned above, quoted by Stewart, *History*, pp. 78-79.

mitted more rapidly than the farmer-preachers could ever have hoped.

The last reason for growth during this period from 1780 to 1827 that we will advance is the use made of church publications. This was not present during the first thirty years of Freewill Baptist history, but in 1811 John Buzzell took to the ink and type with a real zeal. In that year he started his *Religious Magazine*, and this continued for two years, with eight numbers a year. Then it discontinued, to be resumed again in 1821, when it ran for one more year and then was discontinued. It is hard to estimate the effects of this magazine relative to Freewill Baptist growth, but it undoubtedly served to strengthen the regular adherents besides making Freewill Baptist history and doctrine known to others.

The other publication of the Freewill Baptists was the *Religious Informer*, edited and published by Ebenezer Chase, beginning in 1821 and continuing for six years. It too served as a unifying force among the Freewill Baptists, but it had more of newspaper character than did the *Religious Magazine*. Again, it is extremely difficult to assess its influence, but it certainly served a worthy purpose.

INTERNAL AFFAIRS

POLITY

Local Church. The numerical growth which we have traced to 1827 was accompanied by internal developments, among them church polity. The organization of the local church demands our attention first. The Freewill Baptists endeavoured to pattern their churches after the New Testament. This norm, when applied to the local church, meant that, among others, there would be the office of deacon. We read in some of their first records that they chose a deacon by congregational vote and then "proceeded by apostles' rule, firstly prayer, secondly laying on of hands,

and so separated him to the office of deacon." This particular office, along with that of the ruling and teaching elders, was established and occupied from the first.⁶⁴

By 1795, however, the question was raised as to the necessity of the diaconate as distinct from the ruling eldership. It was answered that the office of deacon was necessary because it was the responsibility of the deacon to look after the poor and needy of the church while the ruling elder was to have a more comprehensive task, namely, to care for the welfare of the entire church, especially in the absence of the teaching elder, by seeing that all members walked orderly and that all offices were well performed.⁶⁵

The teaching elder administered the sacraments and preached the Word. The performance of these duties, however, was not to be confined to any one congregation or locality. He was to go to other fields "as oft as he can," and in that he followed the example of Randall. While he was away the ruling elder assumed all his responsibilities except the administering of the sacraments. As a result of this limitation, the monthly communion services were omitted when the teaching elder was away.⁶⁶

It is interesting to note here that the Freewill Baptists faced the problem of evangelization in much the same manner as did the early Church with its comparable positions of prophets, who moved from place to place, and teachers, who followed the former and substituted for them.⁶⁷ Apparently this was a common pattern on the frontier, for in Alline's absence the elders (he was a Congregationalist) led the worship.⁶⁸

Quarterly Meeting. The churches which resulted from Randall's labours considered themselves in fellowship with

⁶⁴ New Durham Church Records, July 25, 1780; May 17, 1781.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, May 17, 1781.

⁶⁶ New Durham Quarterly Meeting Records, I, 59.

⁶⁷ See B. H. Streeter, *The Primitive Church* (London, 1929), chapter three, "Evaluation of Church Order in the New Testament," pp. 67-97.

⁶⁸ M. W. Armstrong, *The Great Awakening in Nova Scotia 1776-1809* (Hartford, 1948), p. 66.

the "Church of Christ at New Durham." The full title of Buzzell's *Religious Magazine* indicated this. It read: *A Religious Magazine: Containing a Short History of the Church of Christ, Gathered at New Durham, New Hampshire, in the year 1780, and now spreading its various branches in almost every direction through the States of New Hampshire, Vermont, the District of Maine, and in many other parts of America.* Buzzell expressed this concept of a link between the churches in another way when he said: "All of the churches which have been gathered since 1780 have been considered in connection with the Church of Christ at New Durham."⁶⁹ It was undoubtedly this affiliation of the "branches" with the New Durham church that gave rise to the use of the phrase "Freewill Baptist Connection."⁷⁰

At first the relatively small number of churches allowed for informal and direct consultation with "Brother Randall and the rest of the church at New Durham." However, as the churches increased in numbers and spread over a wider geographical area, direct communication became burdensome and impractical. Consequently other arrangements were made. Randall was in Maine in the fall of 1783 where he consulted with pastors and churches on the general state of religion. Several of those whom he visited expressed a need for closer association with each other. Accordingly an informal convention was held in Hollis that October to see if the churches would agree to institute an organization for the purpose of adjusting difficulties, ascertaining the true state of religion among them, and ordaining ministers. The churches who approved the idea sent delegates to Hollis for a December meeting. This was the first co-operative or asso-

⁶⁹ Cited by Stewart, *History*, p. 174.

⁷⁰ The term "connection" or, as it was then spelled, "connexion," was used by others in this same sense of "a body or circle of persons connected together by political or religious ties." Wesley used it to describe his relation to those associated with him. It was used by the English General Baptists, and as late as 1845 the Baptists in Maine were described as being in "connexion" with each other. Joshua Millett, *A History of the Baptists in Maine* (Portland, 1845), p. 53; *Freewill Baptist Magazine*, I (1826), 93.

ciational gathering among Freewill Baptist churches, and at it the decision was reached to meet quarterly "for the advancement of Christ's glorious cause." From the frequency of convocation the organization took the title Quarterly Meeting.⁷¹

The introduction of the Quarterly Meeting in 1783 marked a deviation in Freewill Baptist polity. Previous to its inception the autonomy of the local church had been standard. In fact, local autonomy had been so closely guarded that the Quarterly Meeting was called into being by votes of the various churches. Once begun, however, the Quarterly Meeting assumed some of the functions ordinarily reserved for the local church. Ordination was now received from it, although the original recommendation of the candidate came from the local body. Ministerial standing was certified by the Quarterly Meeting. Disciplinary action, though it, too, was initiated by the local congregation, was brought to the Quarterly Meeting for final disposition. Further, the Quarterly Meeting had the authority to appoint committees to settle difficulties in a local church, to assist in calling a minister, and to supply the pulpit of a pastorless church. Most important of all these new developments in connection with the Quarterly Meeting was the conception of it as the Church and the local churches as its branches. In this sense it replaced the Church of Christ at New Durham as the head to which all the branches were related. As a result of this transfer, the individual bodies of believers in a particular locality were no longer called churches. Instead,

⁷¹ Relative to the origin of the title, Quarterly Meeting, Stewart, *History*, p. 75, said that "from this circumstance [i.e. meeting quarterly] the meeting was called the Quarterly Meeting." J. M. Brewster, "The Freewill Baptists" in the *Centennial Record*, p. 19, advanced the same reason for the terminology. He added that the Yearly Meeting also took its name for a similar reason. Since the Methodists did not enter Maine and New Hampshire in sufficient numbers to convene a Quarterly Conference within the area until after 1800, it is doubtful if the Freewill Baptists were influenced by their language at this point. A more plausible conjecture would be that the Quakers, who were active in Kittery, Maine, and its environs, were influential here. R. M. Jones, *The Quakers in the American Colonies* (London, 1911), p. 130.

after 1783 the phrase Monthly Meeting came into popular, though not singular, usage to designate a branch of the Quarterly Meeting.⁷²

In practice the Quarterly Meeting exercised great power, although in theory the Freewill Baptists disclaimed any infringement upon the rights and liberties of the individual church. In Anthony's words:

... the Inquisition could scarcely have searched more diligently into the hidden secrets and private affairs than at times the Quarterly Meeting did in trying to regulate and control the affairs of conscience and worship.⁷³

Stewart, speaking of this period, said that both churches and ministers considered themselves under the supervision of the Quarterly Meeting, "whose authority was *greatly* respected."⁷⁴

As the Freewill Baptists continued to spread over larger geographical areas, many newly-established Monthly Meetings were without the necessary counsel and help to grow and mature. The one Quarterly Meeting was inadequate to care for all the churches. To prevent defections and extinctions of some of these branches, Randall conceived a plan and presented it to a meeting in Barnstead, New Hampshire, in May 1792. He called it his "Method for the Better Regulation of the Church at New Durham." His thought was that the Quarterly Meeting method of supervision was beneficial but that it was not sufficiently concentrated in areas where churches were weak. He proposed that each Monthly Meeting

⁷² Chase, *op. cit.*, p. 110, speaks of Fisher as having monthly meetings for certain groups in his parish. Evidently the phrase was common. The Freewill Baptists use of the term, however, stemmed from the monthly celebration of communion when all members were expected to be present to renew their covenant vows and give verbal expressions of "God's dealings" with them. Stewart, *History*, p. 98.

⁷³ A. W. Anthony, "The Development of a Centralized Form of Government in the Free Baptist Body," a typewritten paper in the Anthony papers, Dexter. It was an address given by Anthony before the Backus Historical Society in 1905. Certainly the New Durham Quarterly Meeting Records support Anthony at this point.

⁷⁴ *History*, p. 116.

provide itself with a clerk and a book for records and that once a quarter delegates appointed by the churches meet to examine the records voluntarily presented and to hear verbal reports of matters that needed attention in the various Monthly Meetings.

Randall's plan was followed, and soon thereafter several additional Quarterly Meetings were organized in various areas to attend to the business of the contiguous churches. The original Quarterly Meeting soon became known as a Yearly Meeting, not because it met annually, for it continued to meet quarterly, but because it met only once a year in any one locality; its quarterly sessions were held in four different places. This Yearly Meeting consisted of delegates from the Quarterly Meetings and heard reports from them, not directly from the Monthly Meetings. Its merit was that, at least once a quarter, by means of it, Randall and his co-workers could ascertain the true condition of the entire connection, even though by this time the churches were numerous and widely dispersed.

This system of Monthly, Quarterly and Yearly Meetings, so related to each other, worked auspiciously until about 1800. Until that time any member of a Monthly Meeting could attend and vote at a session of the Quarterly Meeting. In 1801, however, the New Durham Quarterly Meeting voted that only chosen delegates from the Monthly Meeting could constitute the Quarterly Meeting. Two years later the Yearly Meeting voted to *require* the churches to send their reports to the Quarterly Meetings. These two decisions aroused considerable opposition. First, the Vermont Quarterly Meeting called in question the authority of the Quarterly Meeting to reject a member of a Monthly Meeting. In 1803 that body asked at a Yearly Meeting that this be changed so as to give "each branch . . . the privilege of rejecting transgressing members, the letter of rejection to be read in the Quarterly Meeting and recorded in the minutes." This was voted by the Yearly Meeting although an attempt was made at the next session to change it; however, it was confirmed with the agree-

ment that "any branch organized to receive members has power to reject."⁷⁵

The next endeavour to reverse the trend towards more centralized control of the individual church was led by the Gilmanton Meeting. They asked that instead of requiring a church to bring its records to the Quarterly Meeting that a "letter and general account of their standing" be sufficient. This was approved and a short time later it was decided that "all business of the church in any part of our connection in the future be attended to in the church where it belongs."⁷⁶

In this way any tendency on the part of the Freewill Baptists towards control of the local church was turned aside and the autonomy of the individual congregation preserved.⁷⁷

General Conference. By 1805 the Freewill Baptist denomination had spread into nine different States and consisted of seven Yearly Meetings. Consequently the need of a system to gather reports from the entire body, to secure harmony in doctrine and concert in practice, was obvious. The first direct action to meet this need was taken at the Yearly Meeting held in Sandwich, New Hampshire, in 1826. The question asked was: "Is it expedient to make any alteration in the present arrangement of the Yearly Meeting and to establish a General Yearly Conference for the benefit of the whole?" After vigorous discussion it was postponed at that time. The Yearly Meeting held in Parsonsfield, Maine, returned to the issue the following year, with the result that a committee of twelve was appointed to consider the question while the Yearly Meeting was still in session. Their report provided that the churches continue to report to the Quarterly Meeting, and the Quarterly to the Yearly Meeting but that the Yearly

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 268-269.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

⁷⁷ Partly as a result of the return of the management of local affairs to local bodies, and partly as a result of pressure from the Christian Connection, the title Monthly Meeting, never universally adopted, was gradually eliminated and the term church to designate a local congregation was restored. The Yearly and Quarterly Meetings, however, were still designated as such.

Meeting choose delegates to meet in October 1827 in Tunbridge, Vermont, to constitute the first General Conference. This was the inception of the General Conference of Freewill Baptists.

Even as the apex of Freewill Baptist denominational structure, the General Conference did not usurp the authority of the local congregation. It never had any judicial or legislative functions of its own, but as the churches requested, it uttered their voice "on questions of usage, polity, doctrine and on the moral and benevolent subjects of the day."⁷⁸ Sometimes the General Conference heard a case of discipline but not as a court to mete out punishment; rather such a case was brought to the General Conference in the form of interrogation concerning denominational usage and the replies in such instances were confined to a general statement of denominational custom without any application to the specific occasion of inquiry.⁷⁹ Although it was without any authority to enforce its opinions on the local church, the General Conference was an influential factor throughout the movement through moral persuasion and as a voice on issues of moral concern.

LIFE AND DOCTRINE

Worship. The average Freewill Baptist church worship service of this period had eight distinct parts. A typical meeting was that of October 12, 1803, which has been selected at random for analysis.⁸⁰ This meeting began with what was recorded as "familiar conversation," what we to-day would probably call informal greetings and exchange in the foyer of the church building. This period was followed by a song of praise, and in this case it was a psalm. Then there were "several prayers mouthed," all of them audibly and even two or three concomitantly. Brother Randall then gave what was called the

⁷⁸ "Polity," *Free Baptist Encyclopedia*, eds. G. A. Burgess and J. T. Ward.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ New Durham Church Records, II, 168.

sermon but which in reality was exhortation to leave the "world" and follow after Christ. Immediately thereafter each member present gave an account of God's dealings with himself. Following this, according to the record, the power of God came down, sinners were converted and backsliders restored.

The next item was the business meeting at which time delegates were chosen and letters of admonition were written. This part of the meeting was open to members only whereas the rest of the service had been open to the public. The meeting was closed with prayer.⁸¹ The one variation of this almost rigid pattern of worship was the occasional early assembling of "mail" members to converse on needful things.⁸²

The sacraments of the Freewill Baptists were the Lord's Supper and baptism. The first was celebrated monthly and occurred immediately after the business meeting when only members were present. Unfortunately there are no extant details of how the Supper was commemorated but there are abundant references to the presence of God among them at such seasons.

The sacrament of baptism was observed any time there was need for it, summer or winter. All baptisms were performed out of doors, and the weather was no deterrent to their occurrence.

Discipline. Matters of discipline were prominent from the first. The first case was in September 1780 when the New Durham church was only two months old. The following November a man was cut off from the group fellowship for

⁸¹ The seriousness with which the Freewill Baptists regarded their worship may be seen in a letter written March 7, 1793, to Joseph Jackson, the president of a singing society. The society evidently had requested the church to be allowed to lead the singing during worship. The church took the matter under advisement and then voted that since worship is spiritual it "can't be well pleasing to God to give our consent that the worship should be led by any unless they are believers in Christ." New Durham Church Records, II, 105-107.

⁸² New Durham Church Records, II, 176.

not attending the communion, being without a good excuse for his absence. Thus the record reads for many years, but the lack of discipline was notable following the death of Randall.

The powers of discipline were applied for any number of causes, but the most usual was inexcusable absence from the communion. Some were rejected from the church fellowship for unnamed offences, described simply as "unchristian conduct and disorderly walk."⁸³ The latter conduct included such things as anger or lying or, as on one occasion, swapping horses.⁸⁴ Interestingly enough, there is not a recorded case of immorality until 1794, when a member became pregnant before marriage.⁸⁵

However, the most amazing thing to note in this connection of the matters of discipline is that Randall himself was in difficulty several times with his Christian brethren. Unfortunately for the historian, these troubles remain unnamed. The first of them occurred in 1783 and was between Randall and Deacon Boody, but this was settled within the year by a mutual agreement never to mention the cause of the trouble again. There was more undisclosed trouble again in 1804 with David Ames. By far the most serious statement in any of these personal difficulties involving Randall was that made by Zechariah Boody, a member of the New Durham church. In effect, Boody called Randall a hypocrite when he said that he believed that if "Elder Randall murdered a man and could conceal it, that he could preach the next day."⁸⁶ Randall's own attitude in these cases involving himself is typified by his statement to an offended brother: "As a man I have sinned, as a Christian I'll confess it."

The method of procedure in the case of an offending

⁸³ New Durham Quarterly Meetings Records, I, 76.

⁸⁴ Stewart, *History*, p. 99. The guilty party in the horse trade had concealed evidence as to the horse's health.

⁸⁵ For a good study of similar issues in Massachusetts see C. F. Adams, "Some Phases of Sexual Morality and Church Discipline in Colonial New England," in *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* (2d series, 1891), VI, pp. 477-591.

⁸⁶ New Durham Quarterly Meeting Records, I, 159.

brother was to warn him first by way of private interviews between himself and the other party concerned. If this failed the case was laid before the church, and a committee was appointed "to attend to it." In this the Freewill Baptists were following the Biblical injunction of Matthew 18. If no reformation followed, the offending brother received a letter of admonition from the Monthly Meeting, delivered personally by a fellow member. If needed, a second letter of admonition was sent, but in no case did the Monthly Meeting go beyond this. The final word of rejection, i.e. excommunication, had to come from the Quarterly Meeting, which passed it on to the member through the local meeting. This letter was then read publicly. In the matter of discipline the Quarterly Meeting held the keys.

In all their matters of discipline the Freewill Baptists retained their immense concern for the spiritual well-being of the individual. This is seen by the length of time elapsed before an offending brother was finally cut off.⁸⁷

Ministry. The early Freewill Baptists were intensely aware of the import of the ministry, and as a result of this discernment they took steps to insure its purity and effectiveness. The original procedure for ordination was changed in the progress of time, but at first it was as follows. The person desiring it first procured a letter from his local church stating that he was a member of that body in good standing and that he possessed "public gifts" and that he was "improving" those gifts. Supplied with this letter, the candidate appeared before the Quarterly Meeting, which then usually appointed a committee to hear the young man on his conversion and call to the ministry. If this portion of the examination were completed satisfactorily, the candidate was heard by the entire Quarterly Meeting in a trial sermon. If this sermon gave evidence of both his sincerity and ability the committee voted to proceed with the ordination service in

⁸⁷ In one case it was more than six years.

the local church,⁸⁸ usually within a month of the convocation of the Quarterly Meeting.

As the movement grew, however, so did the number of men who sought ordination. As a result of this growth the Elders Conference of the New Durham Quarterly Meeting was organized in August 1801 with the approval of the Yearly Meeting.⁸⁹ Its membership consisted of teaching and ruling elders, deacons, and "those who are public speakers," or, as they were later called, exhorters. This was enlarged in 1807 to include the stated clerks of Monthly Meetings. The purpose of the Elders Conference was to examine the public speakers, not for ordination at first, but for the preliminary step of approbation. The first step in ordination remained as before, namely, that a candidate must give evidence of his having fellowship with the local Monthly Meeting. After this initial action was taken, the Conference did not ordain immediately, as before, but heard the men "give an account of the impressions of the Spirit in constraining them to go forth in public testimony."⁹⁰ Once satisfied on this point, the Conference then voted only that "they have fellowship with him and that he has their approbation to go forth and improve his gift in the manner and anywhere God may call him from time to time."⁹¹ This approbation is tantamount to our present-day licensure procedure. The full ordination usually followed within a year after this first approval.

The public ceremony of ordination paralleled a present-day ordination programme. First was a prayer, then the right hand of fellowship, followed by the sermon. A second prayer

⁸⁸ See below, p. 53, for a description of the ordination service itself.

⁸⁹ This particular Elders Conference is the only one whose records I have been able to locate. It dissolved in 1848 and apparently had charge of ordinations in its jurisdiction. The Yearly Meeting, and before that, the Quarterly Meeting, controlled ordinations where there was not an Elders Conference expressly established for that purpose.

⁹⁰ Elders Conference Records, I, 6. Rarely did the Conference refuse ordination to a candidate. One man, Nathaniel Weeks, was refused in 1801 because he held that male and female should go out together to preach the Gospel and because he lacked the "stability, gravity and sobriety which the Scriptures require." Elders Conference Records, I, 4.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

was accompanied by the laying on of hands, followed by the charge and then the concluding prayer.⁹² The ordination certificates issued at this time give a valuable insight into the Freewill Baptist concept of the ministry. They always ended with these words, relative to the minister's field of service, "anywhere and at any time the Lord may call him."⁹³

Even more light is shed on the necessity of ordination when we note that the Elders Conference upbraided an unnamed and unordained man for thinking that "having an impression of mind" was sufficient warrant for him to baptize anyone he thought was a fit subject for the ordinance.⁹⁴ Still further we observe that ministerial standing was by Quarterly Meeting only and that if a teaching elder moved from one pastorate within the bounds of a Quarterly Meeting to a pastorate outside its bounds he received a recommendation to the Quarterly Meeting in whose jurisdiction his new pastorate lay.⁹⁵

Relation to Society. Generally speaking, the early Freewill Baptists may be characterized by the term "otherworldly," the same epithet that was given to first century Christians. This delineation is supported especially by their habits of dress. Randall said of himself in his diary that in his early years in Portsmouth he "became superfluous in dress" but that he then considered this to be harmless since he knew of no "order or rank" which condemned such vanity.⁹⁶ In later years Randall dressed very plainly and urged others to do so that they might be examples.

This negative attitude toward society was reflected in another manner. The early Freewill Baptists were averse to civil office-holding by their leaders. References to this disfavour are legion, but one illustration may be beneficial. Joseph Boody had taken a seat at the General Court in

⁹² *Ibid.*, I, 23.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, I, 6.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 85.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 193.

⁹⁶ *Religious Magazine*, II (1821), 207.

Concord. A group of people were distressed by his position and so they requested him to resign from it. Boody refused to comply. The matter was voted on some months later, but this time the vote to ask Boody to withdraw was not unanimous.⁹⁷ The matter was then dropped. This led to a vote taken later that the Quarterly Meeting should deal with any teaching elder who attended courts as a representative of the town or who accepted a commission as a justice of the peace.⁹⁸

There is only one reference to pacifism in the early records. It occurred in 1802 in the form of a letter to Captain Joseph Parsons, who was evidently the commanding officer of a Freewill Baptist soldier. In the letter the Quarterly Meeting said: ". . . it is inconsistent in our view for a disciple of Christ to appear in the training field."⁹⁹ The appeal was made to the captain that he ought not to be the one to cause a little one to offend. No more mention was made of this case after the recorded letter.

Voluntarily or otherwise, the Freewill Baptists carried out in practice what they held in theory against worldly society. They had little of earthly goods. There are two indications of this poverty. One is that when Randall needed a book in which to keep the records of the New Durham Monthly Meeting he was not commissioned to purchase the book immediately but to inquire as to its price.¹⁰⁰ The second symptom of this earthly paucity is that the linen for the communion table was provided by some of the women in the meeting who made it (which in itself was not uncommon), but then they gave it to the church so that there might be something "to cover the Lord's Table."¹⁰¹

This poverty did not prevent the occurrence of a very

⁹⁷ Elders Conference Records, I, 93.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* There was no reason given by the Freewill Baptists for their opposition to office-holding by their teaching elders, but it stemmed at least in part from their desire to have the elders free to travel as much as possible. This opposition was not universal, nor, as in the case in point, unanimous.

⁹⁹ New Durham Quarterly Meeting Records, I, 52.

¹⁰⁰ New Durham Church Records, I, 5.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, June 1787.

interesting means of financial support, that of taking "church stock." There were justifiable expenses in connection with the church, for example, the purchasing of wine for the Lord's Supper, a very significant item when the New Durham church was host to the Quarterly or Yearly Meeting. To meet this and other such expenses the New Durham Meeting voted in 1794 to take "a just valuation of the interest of the male members." This was done and the church then assessed these men about one per cent of their adjudged worth.¹⁰² In this way the financial needs were met and a treasurer was elected by the congregation to care for this "stock." The collection was made quarterly, so that throughout the year a male member paid the equivalent of about four per cent of his material worth.

Doctrine. In the years of the period now under consideration no published work devoted to an exposition of theology appeared. Randall's funeral sermon¹⁰³ and his edition of Alline's *Two Mites*, plus the manuscript references to theology, are our only guides for this segment on doctrine. This paucity is startling when we recall that Randall separated from the Calvinistic Baptists for theological reasons.

From the manuscript sources it is evident that one theological problem under recurrent discussion was the perseverance of the saints. In 1801 Hezekiah Buzzell, a teaching elder, confessed to the Elders Conference that he had been entangled in "that dangerous doctrine."¹⁰⁴ About the same time, Simon Pottle, a Calvinist who had been working with the Freewill Baptists, would not be convinced of the error of holding perseverance and so he separated himself from them.¹⁰⁵ In 1805 a similar case arose with Teaching Elder Elijah Watson,

¹⁰² This is the first instance of systematic collection, although collections had been taken as early as May 1786. New Durham Church Records, I, 39.

¹⁰³ Benjamin Randall, *Sermon, delivered at Farmington, New Hampshire, February 27, 1803, at the interment of Murmooth Fortune Herrick, son of Hallibut and Sally Herrick* (n.p., n.d.).

¹⁰⁴ Henry Alline, *Two Mites Cast Into the Offering of God . . . with some amendments by B. Randal . . .* (Dover, 1804).

¹⁰⁵ Elders Conference Records, I, 6.

but, after three years of "labor," he expressed his willingness to be convinced of the "truth."¹⁰⁶

The funeral sermon and the *Two Mites* broaden the base of our information of early Freewill Baptist theology. The key to the sermon is in the one sentence, "not one of all Adam's posterity will ever be eternally miserable because they fell in him . . . [there is no] text of Scripture which says that any man shall be damned merely for Adam's sin."¹⁰⁷ This argument is advanced to prove that a man is condemned for his own unbelief and not for Adam's transgression. If it is necessary to believe, it follows, said Randall, that it is possible. Therefore he appealed to his hearers to believe so that they will not come into condemnation. By so pleading Randall was teaching the freedom of the will to believe.¹⁰⁸ Randall did not touch on the matter of the safety of the soul on this occasion, but he did emphasize the universality of the call of Christ and that He died for all men.

Alline's *Two Mites* was first printed in 1781. Probably Randall read it at an early date since it was one of the few anti-Calvinistic writings of the period and because Alline died in New Hampshire in 1784. While there is no way of knowing what Randall's amendments to the 1804 edition were, we may assume that he was in sympathy with Alline's views on the freedom of the will. Alline was explicit on this point when he said: "For you must know that there is no other redemption for this fallen man but the turning of his will wholly of choice, after the divine being. . . ." ¹⁰⁹ Then he continued: "And now you may see that there is no bar between you and redeeming love but what is in your own breast, held up by choice."¹¹⁰ Later on he said that "any man's damnation is occasioned by the will of the creature."¹¹¹

From the above brief summary, Freewill Baptist theology

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Randall, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁰⁹ *Two Mites*, p. 21.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

at this juncture may be said to rest on three main propositions. The first was that the sinner, once converted, might, and often did, fall from the state of grace. The second was that the salvation offered by Christ is for all men, and the third was that man has the power of choice in either refusing or accepting what is offered to him. In later years these doctrines were given precise formulation and documentation. In that day, however, they were merely enunciated and people were exhorted to believe them.

It would seem necessary to attempt some explanation of this rather amazing lack of theological discussion. One reason undoubtedly was that the Freewill Baptists were distinctly representative of the sect type of Christianity. One of the most marked characteristics of the sect is an overwhelming emphasis upon Christian life rather than upon doctrines and creeds.¹¹² This naturally leads to voluntary discipline. In both these instances the Freewill Baptists were adhering to the normal pattern. The second covenant of the New Durham church was overwhelmingly practical rather than doctrinal in its outlook. We have already seen the great stress put upon walking in covenantal relationships and the disciplinary action which followed if any one veered from the path.¹¹³

This emphasis of the Freewill Baptists on Christian behaviour rather than doctrine is apparent in at least two other ways. The first is that they allowed non-immersed believers to commune with them at the table provided that their lives gave evidence of their faith in Christ.¹¹⁴ The second manifestation of this emphasis is seen by the fact that the Freewill Baptists wrote a letter in 1786 to the newly formed Calvinistic Baptist Association of New Hampshire. In this letter they said that they looked with love towards all men of every name and denomination "where we find the divine

¹¹² For a discussion of the sect type of Christianity as compared with the Church type, see W. W. Sweet, *American Culture and Religion* (Dallas, 1951), chapter five, entitled, "The Church, The Sect and The Cult in America," pp. 78-98.

¹¹³ Cf. above, pp. 49-51.

¹¹⁴ New Durham Church Records, I, 82.

image and the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace."¹¹⁵ They closed by saying that their hearts and doors were open to the messengers of the "meek and blessed Jesus," of whatever name.¹¹⁶

Another reason for this lack of theological expression is that the Elders Conference served as a kind of theological seminary where doctrinal questions were raised and given thoughtful consideration. We read that on one occasion the ministers "entered into a particular conversation concerning the safety of the soul and made an inquiry whether we are of one mind and sentiment."¹¹⁷ This sort of informal explication was available to the limited number of preachers, and so other doctrinal writing was superfluous.

Undoubtedly the majority of early Freewill Baptist preachers were agreed on the major points of their distinctive tenets. If they had not been, they would not have joined the movement. This fact minimized the need for careful doctrinal exegesis.

The final reason for this theological meagreness, in the records at least, is the humility of the early leaders. As humble men of deep piety they were unwilling to enter into arguments that would invariably generate more heat than light. Randall, in his last recorded communication to the New Durham Quarterly Meeting, exhorted his followers to remain humble and avoid divisions. His words were:

For Christ's sake, . . . let us be little humble, cross-bearing disciples. See to it that we do not get any new-fangled, heady wordy tonguey doctrine of men . . . O, beware of schisms and rents; be not of such as cause divisions; . . . let us have a strife among us, not 'who shall be the greatest?' but who shall be the least of all—who shall be the humblest—who shall be the most of a servant—who shall lay lowest at the feet of Jesus—who shall bring forth the most fruit to the glory of God.¹¹⁸

It was in keeping with this admirable spirit that Chase

¹¹⁵ The whole letter is in Stewart, *History*, 88.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Elders Conference Records, I, 6.

¹¹⁸ Buzzell, *op. cit.*, pp. 278-281.

wrote a reply to a correspondent who had upbraided him for not castigating more severely other denominations. In his reply Chase said, ". . . are you sure that you are free from all error yourself? . . . let us be tender of the feelings of our brother. It is possible that he is right and we are wrong."¹¹⁹

Men that were marked with such humility would not wrangle with their neighbours on doctrinal matters.

OPPOSITION

From the State. The opposition to the Freewill Baptists from the civil authorities came in the form of local tax assessments for the support of the minister agreed upon by the "free-holders" of the town. This arrangement rested upon the Provincial Laws of 1693 which provided that "the selectmen . . . shall make rates and assessments upon the inhabitants of the town for the payments of the minister's salary. . . ."¹²⁰ Also, the Bill of Rights of the constitution adopted in 1784 empowered the legislature to authorize the various towns to make adequate provision, at their own expense, for the "support and maintenance of public protestant teachers of piety, religion, and morality."¹²¹ The revisions to this constitution adopted in 1792 did not materially alter this status.

Under these provisions the Freewill Baptists paid ministerial taxes, and, when they refused, their property was taken.¹²² However, the 1693 law allowed exemptions for those who "attend the public worship of God on the Lord's Day according to their own persuasion." The Bill of Rights of the 1784 constitution did the same in the following words: "And no patron of any one particular religious sect or denomination shall ever be compelled to pay towards the support of the teacher . . . of another persuasion, sect, or denomination."

¹¹⁹ *Religious Informer*, I (1819), 93.

¹²⁰ Quoted by A. S. Batchellor (ed.), *op. cit.*, I, 590.

¹²¹ Quoted by A. P. Stokes, *Church and State in the United States* (3 vols., New York, 1950), I, 429.

¹²² Stewart, *History*, p. 105. See Isaac Backus, *History of New England*, David Weston ed., (2nd ed., Newton, Mass., 1871), *passim*, for accounts of the hardships borne by Massachusetts Baptists under similar circumstances.

The Freewill Baptists endeavoured to avoid taxation on the basis of these provisions. They secured exemption certificates, usually from a Quarterly Meeting, which read that the bearer was a member of the Baptist denomination. One certificate which was copied into the records expanded this to read "that he is a member of the denomination of Baptists and that he has attended no other meeting since he has been in town . . . neither doth he expect to attend any other for the future."¹²³

Sometimes the selectmen honoured these certificates but more often they denied the plea of the holder for exemption on the basis that the Freewill Baptists were not Baptists and therefore not a recognized denomination. To circumvent this excuse, the Freewill Baptists appointed two agents to go to the General Court in Concord, New Hampshire, to seek incorporation.¹²⁴ These men, Joseph Young and John Shepard, reported that a resolve, appropriately passed by the legislature, would settle the matter. Consequently the plan for incorporation was abandoned and a bill was passed by the legislature in November 1804 which relieved the Freewill Baptists from the financial support of ministers chosen by the townspeople.¹²⁵

From the people. Not only did the Freewill Baptists suffer hardship from the State in regard to ministerial taxes, but they were not popular with the majority of the people. There is only one piece of evidence that was entered into official records which shows antipathy to these religious innovators. It is a letter dated November 1780 addressed to the New Durham church. It stated that "the doctrines of free grace and the ordinances of baptism are despised to a great degree."¹²⁶

From Randall's own life, however, we get more insight into the nature of the opposition to the preaching of the Freewill

¹²³ New Durham Quarterly Meeting Records, I, 88.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 112, 144, 153.

¹²⁵ Stewart, *History*, p. 239, said of this resolve: "Here ended all legal opposition to those Freewill Baptists who notified the selectment of their unwillingness to be taxed for the support of the Congregationalists."

¹²⁶ New Durham Quarterly Meeting Records, I, 92.

Baptist Gospel. One incident illustrates very well the tenor of this hatred. Randall was invited to preach in a meeting house in Maine and went to keep the appointment. When he arrived, the pastor of the church met him with the query as to the authority he had to preach. Randall's reply was that he was called and authorized by God to preach the Gospel to every creature. The pastor then demanded that Randall work a miracle to substantiate his call. He told Randall to turn a whip into a serpent, whereupon a standee said to the pastor: "If he was to, you would be the first man that would run from it."¹²⁷ This created an uproar, whereupon Randall asked for silence and told the crowd that he would use a nearby grave for his pulpit and the heavens for his sounding board. A time of revival followed.¹²⁸

From the Shakers. Serious and disagreeable as the aforementioned hindrances were, the real source of grief and distress to the Freewill Baptists came from the Shakers, especially in the area surrounding Loudon and Canterbury.

Under the leadership of Mother Ann Lee, the Shakers had come to the New World from England in 1774. Their first permanent settlement was near Albany, New York, made in 1776, but a remarkable revival followed in 1779 and this spread their fame into New England. In 1781 an itinerant peddler, Benjamin Thompson, having heard of the Shakers, visited them in New York State. Later he visited Canterbury, New Hampshire, and his account of the Shakers interested some of the Freewill Baptists who were being shepherded by Edward Lock at the time. They sent a committee to visit the Shakers at Harvard, Massachusetts, where Mother Lee was preaching. After this visitation to Harvard, two Shaker preachers, Ebenezer Colley and Israel Chauncy, went to Canterbury. These two were the first to preach Shakerism in Loudon Center. That was in September 1782.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Buzzell, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 102-103.

¹²⁹ Anna White and Leila Taylor, *Shakerism, Its Meaning and Message* (Columbus, 1904), pp. 90-92

From the time of this first Shaker testimony in the Loudon-Canterbury area, the Freewill Baptist cause there was under a shadow. The Shaker community immediately claimed most, if not all, of the Freewill Baptist membership. Henry Clough, who had been an early convert to the Freewill Baptists and an elder in their church, went over to the Shakers almost at once and became a zealous missionary for them. Benjamin Whitcher, another timely convert to the Freewill Baptists, became a Shaker in 1782 and his farm became the rallying point of Shakerism in the area. For the decade before the opening of the Shaker Community in Canterbury in 1792, Whitcher's farm was the site of Shaker meetings and in 1792 the farm became a part of the Shaker Village. It consisted of 100 acres and was valued at \$1,250.¹³⁰

When such prominent members of the Freewill Baptists went over to the Shakers, including even its pastor, it was difficult and then later impossible for the church to maintain its identity. On January 13, 1783, only a few months after the Shakers first preached in Loudon, the Freewill Baptists wrote to Randall and "the rest of the church at New Durham" and appealed for help. The letter states "... all of our Elders and Deacons have left us and joined the Shaking Quakers (so called) and with them a great part of the church."¹³¹ The New Durham church gave enough assistance to keep the church alive until a permanent church was reconstituted in 1794 by Randall.¹³²

Although the Shaker defection was the largest in the Loudon-Canterbury area, it was not limited to that community. Lock himself moved to Strafford and there also the Freewill Baptist church nearly disintegrated because of Shaker pressure, but it was Randall again who helped it to keep its visibility through its reorganization in July 1783.¹³³ This church later enjoyed a prosperous period under the leadership of Elder Winthrop Young.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

¹³¹ This letter has been preserved in Stewart, *History*, p. 69.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 147.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

The Shaker movement then continued farther north into Maine. In 1793 a society was organized in Alfred, Maine, but there is no mention of a Freewill Baptist group in that town. The same situation prevailed in New Gloucester, Maine, but there was a Calvinistic Baptist church there. In Gorham, Maine, however, the Shakers succeeded in drawing off a few of the Freewill Baptist members.¹³⁴

The full extent of the Shaker influence on the Freewill Baptists was stated by Stewart when he said: "Not one of the free churches but suffered more or less from their proselyting efforts."¹³⁵ This indicates how great was the obstacle that the Shakers put in the path of the movement in the years before 1800.

This propensity of Freewill Baptists for Shakerism merits further study. It should be pointed out that the Shakers found revival territory fruitful areas in which to proselyte. This was true not only in New England but also in Kentucky and southern Ohio where one of their most famous converts was Richard McNemar of the Springfield Presbytery. Two others of the same group also welcomed the Shakers at first but later stumbled over their doctrine of celibacy.¹³⁶ This appeal of the Shakers in places where religious enthusiasm was prevalent is to be explained by the fact that such areas were emotionally unsettled, and Shaker doctrine seemed to be a logical extension of what had already taken place. Thus one Shaker queried John Cotton of Alfred, Maine: "You profess the life of Christ but do you actually have it?"¹³⁷ The implication was that the Shakers did exhibit the "life" in their dances and communal living while the others had not as yet entered upon it. It was as a further step in the revolt against Calvinism that Shakerism had its appeal at the outset, but when the Freewill Baptists and others learned all that Shakerism taught, such as celibacy and the incarnation of God in the person of Ann Lee, the Shaker inroad stopped

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ E. D. Andrews, *The People Called Shakers* (New York, 1953), p. 38.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

abruptly. It is significant that after 1784 the Freewill Baptists no longer found their way into Shaker communities.

These years from 1780 to 1827 saw not only the extension of Freewill Baptists into surrounding areas, but they also marked the formulation of their basic polity and the ossifying of their doctrine. In this sense the period was crucial and preparatory for the enlarged efforts which lay just ahead.

CHAPTER III

MISSION OUTREACH AND SOCIAL REFORM 1827-1844

THE YEARS from 1827 until after the Civil War¹ constituted for the Freewill Baptists the most prolific period, notable both in the rise of benevolent enterprises and the proliferation of doctrinal and literary treatises. It might well be called the Golden Age of the Freewill Baptists. They had begun to mature in the realms of theology and social responsibility and their productions during these years reflect this transformation. It is our present purpose to view their deeds at this juncture in their history while Chapter IV will be concerned with their doctrinal outlook.

FOREIGN MISSIONS

History. It is a salient fact in Freewill Baptist history that a full fifty years expired before missionary activity, either foreign or domestic, was undertaken.² Further, it is also note-

¹ 1827 had marked the completion of the development of Freewill Baptist polity and therefore was an ideal terminus. Prior to that date, no benevolent enterprise had been conceived by the Freewill Baptists. Beginning in 1832, however, such undertakings were copious and continued until the 1870's. It has been thought best to divide this period into two phases, 1827-1844 and 1844-1878. The former saw the rise of all the beneficent works except for the college and freedmen's ventures which came in the years from 1844 to 1878. They will be considered in Chapter V.

² While this fact is technically true, and actually no foreign mission society was organized before 1832, nor any missionary sent until 1835, yet as early as 1827 an exposition of Matthew 28:18 appeared in the *Morning Star*. Further, letters from General Baptist missionaries to their own Boards were reprinted in the *Morning Star* about that time. The general accounts of foreign work then being done by the regular Baptists in Burma appeared in that paper. Some of Sutton's journals were printed prior to 1832. See the *Morning Star*, 1827-1830, *passim*. Thus it can legitimately be said that the soil was prepared, in a measure at least, for the organization of the foreign mission society, even though it did not bear fruit until 1832.

worthy that even when the mission enterprise began, both areas, domestic and foreign, were stimulated by appeals for help from without, that is, by external motivation, rather than by a theological or doctrinal compulsion. This will be seen from the following account.

The foreign mission of the Freewill Baptists began in England and in India with the missionary of the English General Baptists, Amos Sutton. He had gone to Orissa in 1824, under the General Baptist Board.³ In 1826 Sutton married the widow of Mr. Coleman, one of Adoniram Judson's associates in Burma who had died there in 1822. One day, while pondering the desperate plight of the heathen in India and being forcefully reminded of their inadequate personnel and funds, Mrs. Sutton, being an American, thought of the Freewill Baptists in America as ones who might render them some aid. She knew little about them except that their doctrine of free will and general salvation paralleled what her husband and the English General Baptists believed. She urged her husband to write to them, seeking help, but when Sutton finished the letter, Mrs. Sutton could not recall an address to which to send it. Nearly three years later a package addressed to Mrs. Sutton came from the United States which, in the most fortuitous circumstances, was partially wrapped in a copy of *The Morning Star!* This supplied the missing address and the waylaid letter was promptly resurrected and dispatched to John Buzzell, then the editor of the *Star*, who published it in the issue of April 13, 1832, together with his remarks on it. This happy chain of circumstances was the beginning of Freewill Baptist foreign mission work.

Since this particular letter was the inception of all Freewill

³ The General Baptists of England had organized a foreign mission society in 1816 with the Reverend J. G. Pike as their first secretary. They sent James Peggs and William Bampton to Orissa as early as 1822, settling them in Cuttack. They were joined in 1824 by Sutton and Lacey. Sutton later wrote a book entitled *Orissa and Its Evangelization* (Boston, 1850), which gave a full account of the early General Baptist mission. Pages 104-5 listed all the missionaries to Orissa, both English and American, to 1850. Dana Albaugh, *Between Two Centuries* (Philadelphia, 1935), has a good second hand account of the Bengal-Orissa work.

Baptist benevolent work abroad, it is necessary to summarize its contents, as well as to reflect on Buzzell's comments. Sutton opened the communication by sketching the history of the General Baptist mission in Orissa and then proceeded to appeal to the Freewill Baptists of America for help in conducting it, saying that if they believed that Christ tasted death for every man, then why not make the Gospel known to every man and send missionaries to tell the message. "You profess to believe this," he prodded, "make then your exertions as liberal as your sentiments." He closed the letter with just a brief word about the Hindu deity, Juggernaut, and the miseries of his worshippers, and then finally, he asked for one or two labourers to come to Calcutta where he promised to meet them and accompany them to Orissa.⁴

It is significant that the letter of Sutton and the editor's remarks occupied a full page of *The Morning Star* which was more space than had heretofore been devoted to a single topic. Moreover, Buzzell's comments were longer than the original letter which is indicative of the interest shown by at least one Freewill Baptist from the very beginning. Buzzell was quick to pick up the implied charge of hypocrisy by expressing his regrets that Freewill Baptist "sentiments" and "conduct" did not correspond. He pointed out the inconsistency of their belief that God had made all nations of one blood, that all men have sinned, that Jesus tasted death for every man, that Christ is the true light of every man, and that He commanded "Go Ye," and that the Freewill Baptists had not yet sent any mission to the heathen. Further, said Buzzell, the Freewill Baptists had fallen behind other denominations in this regard, but not because they were financially unable to carry out a programme. He expressed great confidence that they could "foot the bill," as he said, for one or two men to go to India, and concluded by suggesting that four steps be taken to gather the necessary support. First, appoint a meeting in every church for the express purpose of gathering funds for missions; second, let the minister in charge, or anyone

⁴ *Morning Star*, April 13, 1832.

else, open the contribution; third, let the money be counted and the amount declared to the meeting; fourth, let the clerk of the church send the money to Buzzell who "pledges himself . . . that the said money . . . is safely funded for the above purpose."⁵

Buzzell went on to say that by publishing the amounts he received in *The Morning Star* the Connection would soon know whether they could do anything for "our poor benighted fellow mortals in blood-stained Orissa or not."⁶

These proposals were evidently followed quite generally for the succeeding numbers of the *Star* showed numerous small donations for the work. It was this encouraging flow of money that led to an organizational meeting of the Freewill Baptist Foreign Mission Society in the fall of 1832 at North Parsonsfield, Maine, presided over by John Buzzell. It was incorporated by the Maine Legislature the following January.

While some success was had almost immediately, there were many Freewill Baptists who were cool to the cause of Christ outside the United States. The leaders, such as Buzzell, who were the most interested in the work, took steps to kindle enthusiasm. They arranged to have Sutton, who had returned to England in 1832 for reasons of health, visit America early in 1833. He spoke at the New Hampshire Yearly Meeting that June. His appeal must have been dramatic, for the response was two-fold, both men and money. Financially, the response was \$100, but more significant was a slip of paper handed in on the offering plate. It read: "I give myself." It had been penned by a young man, Jeremiah Phillips, then a student at Hamilton College in Clinton, New York, and a member of the Free Communion Baptist Church at Plainfield, New York. He had walked the entire distance of 150 miles to Guilford, New Hampshire, to hear Sutton. The consecration which he had expressed on the paper bore fruit when he became a member of the first party of Freewill Baptist missionaries to sail to India. That did not take place until 1835, but before he sailed

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

he married the widow of Samuel Beede who, at his death, was the junior editor of the *Star*.

The other missionary couple that comprised that first sailing was Eli Noyes and his wife. He first became interested in the foreign field through David Marks, then a member of the Executive Committee of the Freewill Baptist Foreign Mission Society, who proposed that Noyes go to India. At the time Noyes was teaching in Jefferson, Maine, and was a member of the Freewill Baptist church there. Marks persuaded him to relinquish his teaching post and go to study at the Parsonsfield Academy which had just opened.⁷ Marks' was so thoroughly interested in seeing Noyes go to India that he undertook to raise money for his passage and outfit, and even attended Noyes' wedding when he married Clementina Pierce of Portsmouth.⁸

These two couples landed at Calcutta on February 4, 1836, to begin the work in India which continues to the present, although it is now under the auspices of the American Baptist Convention. From the first, the Freewill Baptist missionaries enjoyed a close and harmonious fellowship with the English General Baptists. They spent their first few months at the latter's station at Balasore in language study. By January 1837 they felt sufficiently advanced in the language to open a new station at Sambhalpur, 250 miles inland from Cuttack. This first venture was ill-fated almost from the start. The inland climate did not agree with the Americans and by November of that year, Mrs. Phillips and her infant daughter had died. Mr. Phillips's life was endangered by ill health and before the year ended, the three remaining missionaries left for Cuttack and the Sambhalpur station was abandoned.

Once again the General Baptists befriended the Americans and they offered them the station at Balasore, recently vacated by Goadby, their missionary who had returned to England.

⁷ *Second Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Foreign Mission Society* (Dover, 1835), p. 5.

⁸ Marilla Marks (ed.), *Memoirs of the Life of David Marks, Minister of the Gospel* (Dover, 1847), pp. 328-329.

Beginning in February 1838 the Freewill Baptists maintained the station at Balasore, the only one they staffed until Phillips left it to open a new work at Jelasore in 1840.

While Phillips and the Noyes family were actively at work in India, the Freewill Baptists were stimulating missionary interest at home. Their plan was to have each church become a missionary society which would meet monthly to advance the cause of missions, and take collections for the work at this meeting. This programme was adopted in enough churches so that by 1840 the Society was financially able to send out three new missionaries, the Reverend Otis R. Bacheler, M.D., and Mrs. Bacheler and Miss Hannah Cummings. They arrived in Calcutta in September 1840 and went to Jelasore to help Phillips. Here Miss Cummings became the third Mrs. Phillips.⁹ With the Bachelers to spell him at the home compound, Phillips began work among the nearby Santals. It was in the matter of the Santal language that Phillips was to make a notable contribution. He later reduced their language to writing, and produced a grammar and a dictionary.

By 1841 the Noyes family was forced to return home and the Bachelers took charge of the Balasore work. This meant that after the first five years of work, the Freewill Baptists had four missionaries at two stations, one of which they had inherited from the General Baptists.

On May 7, 1844, the Reverend and Mrs. James C. Dow arrived in Calcutta and in November they moved to Midnapore, another legacy from the General Baptists. This was a particularly valuable station inasmuch as it was in a strategic district in the Orissa province.¹⁰ They were supplemented at this station for a time by the arrival of Miss Sarah Merrill of Stratham, New Hampshire, in 1846. She subsequently married

⁹ In 1839 Phillips had married Miss Mary Anne Grimsditch, the foster daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Mack, Scottish missionaries stationed at Serampore. She died in August, 1840. J. M. Brewster *et al.*, *The Centennial Record of Freewill Baptists* (Dover, 1881), p. 119.

¹⁰ Albaugh, *op. cit.*, p. 135, cites this district as the most advanced in culture and industry.

Dr. Bacheler and went to the Balasore station with him.¹¹

The next few years saw more missionary arrivals in India but because of deaths and returns, the number of stations remained constant as did the actual missionary staff. The Cooleys, graduates of Oberlin, arrived in August 1849 and supplemented Phillips at Jelasore. Miss Lavinia Crawford of Whitestown Seminary left Boston in October 1850 and worked first at Jelasore and then Balasore and when a new station was opened at Santipur, she went there in 1856. The poor health of the Bachelers compelled them to return in 1851. B. B. Smith and his wife of Sandwich, New Hampshire, went out in 1852 but Mrs. Phillips and her children returned in 1854 and Phillips followed the next year so that this personnel gain was offset almost immediately. E. C. B. Hallam and his wife replaced Phillips at Jelasore in 1857.¹²

The year 1857 marks a good breaking point in the history of Freewill Baptist missions in India for in that year the Sepoy Rebellion brought to an end the rule of the East India Company and the next year saw the British Crown in control of India. Henceforth, until 1947, the missionaries worked in India as a part of the British Empire.

Motivation. Having sketched briefly the progress of the foreign mission programme among the Freewill Baptists, the question must now be asked, why did it come about? Ostensibly the answer lies in the work of Amos Sutton who inaugurated the interest with his letter to *The Morning Star* and who actively promoted the work for two years as the Corresponding Secretary of the Freewill Baptist Foreign Mission Society. But we cannot be satisfied with this single motivation except as a part of a larger movement.

From 1810 to 1835 the Protestant missionary movement

¹¹ The first Mrs. Bacheler had died in January 1845. M. M. Hutchins Hills, *Reminiscences: a brief History of the Free Baptist India Mission* (Dover, 1885), p. 61; *Twelfth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Foreign Mission Society* (Dover, 1845), pp. 5-6.

¹² Most of the above personal history has been taken from Hills, *op. cit.*, and J. M. Brewster, "The Foreign Mission," in *The Centennial Record*, pp. 113-134.

was characterized by the formation of national societies, a movement in general conformity to the nationalism of the times. Geographically the United States had purchased the Louisiana Territory in 1803 and in 1819 had acquired Florida. Militarily the War of 1812 had disseminated a sense of national well-being and strength. The "American System" of Clay, Calhoun's suggestion that the federal government provide national transportation facilities, John Marshall's decisions in favour of national authority, and the Monroe Doctrine all were indicative of the fact that men were living in an era of nationalism. A concomitant spirit of nationalism was felt in religious circles in the organization of both denominational and inter-denominational enterprises.¹³

The formation of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was the pioneer undertaking¹⁴ but it unintentionally caused the inception of the General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America for Foreign Missions¹⁵ when two of its first missionaries, Luther Rice and Adoniram Judson, became Baptists. Other foreign mission enterprises were launched soon thereafter.¹⁶

Interdenominational co-operation, reflecting the growing nationalism, was expressed in the formation of the American

¹³ J. O. Oliphant, "The American Missionary Spirit, 1828-1835," *Church History* VII (1938), 125-137, has a good discussion of the later years of the period.

¹⁴ W. E. Strong, *The Story of the American Board* (Boston, 1910), pp. 3-16, has the most detailed account of the events leading to the inception of the American Board.

¹⁵ R. G. Torbet, *History of the Baptists* (Philadelphia, 1950), p. 269.

¹⁶ The Methodist Episcopal Church sent its first missionary out of the country in 1832; the Protestant Episcopal Church organized its Missionary Society in 1820 and in 1835 the Church was made the missionary agency rather than having a distinct agency for that purpose. J. T. Addison, *The Episcopal Church in the United States 1789-1931* (New York, 1951), pp. 129-134; W. H. Stowe, "The General Convention of 1835," *Historical Magazine*, IV (1935), 152-179. The Presbyterian Church at first supported the American Board, as did the Reformed Church in America, but eventually both bodies formed their own missionary societies. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States organized its Foreign Mission Society in 1837. The Unitarians supported the English Unitarian foreign programme until they embarked on their own work in 1854. The Quakers did not launch their overseas programme until the 1870's because of internal dissension.

Bible Society in 1816, the American Tract Society in 1825, the American Home Mission Society in 1826, and the American Sunday School Union that same year; still others such as the American Society for the Promotion of Temperance, the General Union for the Promotion of the Observation of the Christian Sabbath, and the American Anti-Slavery Society originated in the late eighteen twenties and early thirties. In fact, the benevolent and humanitarian impulse was so great that its work has been called the "benevolent empire,"¹⁷ "the Puritan Counter-Reformation,"¹⁸ and "disinterested benevolence at work."¹⁹

This productive impetus has merited investigation as to its origins. Charles Keller made a special study of all the humanitarian movements in Connecticut where numerous benevolent agencies arose from 1800 to 1835. After speaking of the revivals there, he said: ". . . the new religious spirit found expression . . . in missionary activities, the distribution of Bibles, and humanitarianism. . . ."²⁰ He proceeded to trace the rise of female organizations and projects to the religious awakening. Then he concluded by saying:

It will not be inappropriate at this point to call attention to a fact made clear by this study, namely that the humanitarians and reformers of the 1830-1860 generation were . . . building on foundations laid down from 1800 to 1839. . . . Influenced by the new religious spirit these early reformers and humanitarians were motivated by a desire to do their Christian duty.²¹

Other students of the work of Christian beneficence have also ascribed their provocation to revivalism. W. W. Sweet has spoken clearly on this point as follows:

The many reform movements which swept over the English-speaking world in the latter eighteenth and early nineteenth

¹⁷ Merle Curti *et al.*, *An American History* (2 vols.; New York, 1950), I, 398.

¹⁸ E. B. Greene, *Proceedings American Antiquarian Society*, New Series, XLII (1932), 17-46.

¹⁹ W. W. Sweet, *Religion in the Development of American Culture* (New York, 1952), entitled chapter eight with this phrase.

²⁰ Charles Keller, *The Second Great Awakening in Connecticut* (New Haven, 1942), p. 55.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

century owed much of their impetus to revivalism. The new humanitarian impulse which lay back of all such movements has a direct relationship to the revivalistic emphasis upon the inestimable worth of each individual soul.²²

Coming now to the more specific interest in foreign missions, Kenneth Scott Latourette likewise links that enterprise with revivals. While giving the world situation its proper place in the spread of Christianity through such occurrences as migrations, commerce, and conquests, he states:

The remarkable expansion of Christianity in the nineteenth century was not simply nor even primarily the result of a favorable environment. It was due to an upsurging, creative impulse within Christianity itself. . . . The chief cause of the unprecedented spread of Christianity in this era was an innate energy within the faith itself.²³

A little later, Latourette picks up the point and summarizes by saying:

The reasons for the spread of Christianity were many . . . [including the air of hope, increase in money, improvements in communication and the expansion of commerce]. All of these, however, would have been of no avail had they not been paralleled by the burst of new life within Christianity itself. It was this surge of vitality which was the primary cause of daring vision, the comprehensive plans and the offering of life and money which sent missionaries to all corners of the globe . . . it is this which led to . . . the erection of hospitals . . . the rise of educational systems . . . this vast outpourings of life is found to have its origin in the impulse which came through Jesus.²⁴

As a renewal of the Great Awakening, the Freewill Baptists confirm this pattern of Christian altruism elicited by revivalism. It was their concern for individual souls, born of their own awakening, that provoked the first response to send

²² *Revivalism in America, its origin, growth and decline* (New York, 1944), p. 152. See also chapter seven, "The By-Products of Revivalism," pp. 140-161.

²³ *History of the Expansion of Christianity* (7 vols.; New York, 1937-1945), IV, 22.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

out foreign missionaries. It was this same concern that the missionaries kindled when they wrote home about the conditions in a heathen land. One or two illustrations will serve to bring this solicitude into focus. Sutton's letter which was so historic in Freewill Baptist history closed with the following words:

I have seen mangled victims of his [Juggernaut's] infatuated adorers lying by hundreds upon hundreds, exposed to the birds and beasts. I have listened to their dying exclamations . . . and have seen them die. . . . I have seen the pit dug and the fire kindled in it, to consume the young widow with her husband's corpse. . . . I have seen the withered victims crushed beneath it [Juggernaut's car]. . . . The gospel is the antidote for all these miseries. . . .²⁵

The letters from the field more often than not appealed to the people on this same basis of human need and suffering. The first missionary station was just off the path that the pilgrims took to Juggernaut and of course the missionaries saw thousands of bodies by the wayside, those of pilgrims who had perished *en route* to the pagan festivals. One time they found a woman's body with two children sitting on it, and the missionaries asked them where their home was. Pointing to their dead mother, they said, "Our home is where our mother is."²⁶

Descriptions of the heathen self-mutilations abound in the letters reaching America from India.²⁷ One of the most tortuous of all the practices was that of hook-swinging whereby a Hindu would allow a large hook to be inserted under his shoulder blade and then be swung in a circle while suspended from a rope on a high bar. This sometimes would last for hours until the victim was sure that his sins were forgiven.

The filth and moral degradation of the heathen was also a recurring theme in letters from missionaries to their friends.

²⁵ *Morning Star*, April 13, 1832.

²⁶ *Sixth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Foreign Mission Society* (Dover, 1839), p. 11.

²⁷ *Morning Star*, 1837-1838, *passim*.

These letters usually found their way into the columns of *The Morning Star* where, of course, they had a wide reading. Sutton was quoted in one place as follows:

Among those who assembled were four or five common women . . . they bear the marks of their shame . . . and if you were to ask one of these poor wretches who she is? she would with the utmost effrontery reply, I am a prostitute . . . there is a regular class of persons who pursue this course of iniquity as a trade . . . and if they have children, they are brought up to this wretched life as a thing of course. ²⁸

The temporal care for the individual, however, was put into a larger context of eternal well-being and not limited to just the deliverance from the present grip of heathenism. The purpose and scope of Freewill Baptist foreign missions was asserted in the sixth annual report of the Society. It said in part:

The human soul is wrecked. Her compass is perverted and her anchor lost. She drifts a prey to passion's tides and blasts flounders upon the rock of sin—sinks beneath the bellows of eternal ruin. It is the object of the missionary enterprise to present to her an anchor sure and steadfast—to put into her possession a compass invariable, guiding to the house of eternal rest and glory.²⁹

Thus far the motivation for foreign missions among the Freewill Baptists has been seen as a concern for the temporal and the eternal welfare of individuals in all heathen lands, but particularly in Bengal-Orissa. This concern was touched off by the revivalistic emphasis upon the value of the individual.

Let us consider one more prominent factor in the motivating of Protestant missions. O. W. Elsbree made a study of the rise of the missionary spirit in America for the years from 1790 to 1815 and his conclusion was as follows:

²⁸ *Sixth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Foreign Mission Society*, p. 17.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

To save countless millions of heathen from everlasting punishment, to emulate their British brethren in their heroic efforts to evangelize the world; to obey the Great Commission . . . and to put into practice the principle of disinterested benevolence . . . were the most conspicuously stressed motives for Christians to engage in foreign missions. But acting as a dynamic back of these motives was the all but universal conviction that Bible prophesies clearly referred to events which were transpiring.³⁰

Elsbree then cited various preachers and their messages to buttress his contention as to the strength of the underlying conviction of Biblical prophecies supposedly being fulfilled at that time.³¹ The Freewill Baptists' motivation confirms these generalizations outlined by Elsbree with the notable exception of eschatological compulsion. On this constraint, the Freewill Baptist literature is all but silent.³²

Perhaps the parallels that have been drawn between Freewill Baptist procedures and those of other denominations is to be explained by the fact that they were aware of the programmes of other groups.³³ This alertness helps to account

³⁰ *The Rise of the Missionary Spirit in America 1790-1815* (Williamsport, Pa., 1928), pp. 142-143.

³¹ See especially chapter six, "Prophecy, Prayer and Propaganda," pp. 122-145. Leonard Woods, of Andover Theological Seminary, preached the sermon at the historic departure of the five young men from Salem in 1812. One of the reasons he urged for support of the missionary enterprise on that occasion was the expectation that in so doing prophecy would be fulfilled sooner. *Ibid.*, pp. 144-145. David Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont 1791-1850* (New York, 1939), pp. 38-40, cites "the times of the prophecies" as one of the strongest motives for the Puritan counter-reformation.

³² The one passage of eschatological import that was found in all the foreign mission literature reads as follows: "The Gospel of our Saviour is all powerful . . . to gather all nations unto him . . . A holy and blissful Sabbath of a thousand years the world shall know. The Gospel's influence shall bring it to pass . . . This justifies our expectation that we hail as near at hand that period when our Lord will reign the king of nations as now king of saints and with assurance that takes hold on firm realities of glorious success to be accomplished, we engage in the holy work of missions." *Sixth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Foreign Mission Society*, pp. 13-14.

³³ The Freewill Baptists printed reports of the Congregational work in the Sandwich Islands; they followed with great interest the Baptist work in Burma. They were also concerned themselves with the inter-denominational movements such as the tract and Bible societies. *Morning Star*, 1832-1840, *passim*.

for their missionary programme which, as we have seen, was externally stimulated. It may be that cultural osmosis, the absorbing of interests and designs from others, accounts for Freewill Baptist benevolent activity. Certainly they were not pioneers; they followed in a path which was delineated by other churches. In general they conform to the denominational activities of the period.

HOME MISSION

History. As Amos Sutton was the chief human instrument in the formation of the Freewill Baptist Foreign Mission Society, so was David Marks the agent in the beginning of the next benevolent society, that for home missions. Marks was the agent for the publishing house of the Freewill Baptists and as such he travelled several thousands of miles annually on routine publishing business. In his travels, he encountered everywhere appeals for labourers to help in the various sections of New England, New York, and the Mid-West. As these calls increased in number and passion, he began to talk with his friends about the needs. He conversed most frequently with Mr. William Burr, the printer of *The Morning Star*. They agreed that Marks should write a notice, which Burr would then print, calling for an organizational meeting of a society for home missions. The notice appeared in the *Star* of July 9, 1834, and the meeting was held in Dover, New Hampshire, on July 31, 1834.³⁴ At Dover, the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society was organized.³⁵ The first action of the new Society was to recommend that ten men be employed immediately to go into new areas with the Freewill Baptist gospel. However, only one man, Jonathan Woodman, was available. He was appointed to work in Boston and Portland for about three months that first year. The next year he was employed for six months. Home missions outside of New

³⁴ This notice is reprinted in convenient form in Brewster *et al.*, *Centennial Record*, p. 135.

³⁵ Marks, *op. cit.*, p. 325. The constitution of the Home Mission Society was printed in the *Morning Star*, August 20, 1834.

England began in 1835 when the Society sent the Reverend Benjamin F. Nealy of Montpelier, Vermont, and a Yale graduate, to Michigan. Nealy proceeded to establish himself in Howard, Michigan, ninety miles east of Chicago. At Howard, Nealy bought property and began to build a combination school and house. The school was given the proud name of the Randalian Seminary and two young women left New England in 1836 to form its teaching staff. In that same year, the Reverend Samuel L. Julian went to Howard to assist Nealy in the preaching missions in the area. Even with the staff of four, the school did not prosper sufficiently to pay for the building and it was eventually sold and the remaining money was turned over to the Home Mission Society.³⁶

Up until this time, the Howard work was the only one sponsored by the Society. Its failure seems to have effected a change in the strategy of the Society. Evidently it awakened the leaders to the danger of concentrating all their efforts in one locality. Thus we read in their fifth annual report: "Hereafter, instead of confining our attention chiefly to one station, we shall take into view our whole country and wish to do all that our feeble means will enable us to, to supply the destitute and needy wherever we can."³⁷

In keeping with this change of outlook, missionaries were now sent into new areas. Julian, who had been working with Nealy in Michigan, went into Illinois immediately. Amos Andrus and R. M. Carey were sent to Illinois in 1841. Workers were also sent into the Montville Quarterly Meeting in Maine and into Nova Scotia. The work in Michigan was expanded under the direction of H. S. Limbocker. In 1843 the first Freewill Baptist missionary went to Chicago. That same year a Freewill Baptist church was organized in Missouri. In 1846 N. W. Bixby entered Iowa with the Freewill Baptist banner. By 1851 Nathan Ames had planted Freewill Baptist seed in Minnesota. In 1853 the Home Mission Society sent an agent

³⁶ Brewster *et al.*, *Centennial Record*, p. 141.

³⁷ *Fifth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society* (Dover, 1838), p. 8.

into Canada for the purpose of working with the escaped slaves. The next year, 1854, Ransom Dunn began his work in Illinois and Wisconsin.³⁸

At the same time that the Freewill Baptists were entering the West, they were also aware of the needs of urban areas which were developing in the third and fourth decades of the nineteenth century. *The Morning Star* editorialized in 1835 that although no efforts had been made to enter the cities prior to that time, there was no good reason for not doing so because city churches "can be benefited and with less labour on the preacher's part than where the population is scattered."³⁹ The Home Mission Society declared in 1839:

Another object which the Home Mission Society has in view, is to assist feeble churches and supply destitute places . . . throughout the country. We have quite a number of feeble churches in large towns, villages and cities which need aid, and . . . in a short time . . . large and efficient churches would exist in those places. . . .⁴⁰

Approximately the same sentiment was voiced again in 1841 when the Society appealed for funds for feeble churches as follows:

We are decidedly of the opinion that if the . . . fund were such that we could afford some little help to several churches in cities and villages where a few brethren are now struggling hard to sustain preaching, there soon might be large and permanent churches raised up. . . .⁴¹

In 1846 the Society pleaded for funds with which they might establish a work in Lawrence, Massachusetts, where large factories were then being erected. In its appeal, it admitted that Freewill Baptists had suffered "much inconvenience in attempting to raise churches in large places by

³⁸ Brewster *et al.*, *Centennial Record*, p. 193.

³⁹ August 26, 1835.

⁴⁰ *Fifth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society*, p. 9.

⁴¹ *Seventh Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society* (Dover, 1841), p. 4

not commencing their efforts at an earlier season. . . . It is hoped that we may meet with better success in this new village by commencing at this early period."⁴²

By their own confession, then, Freewill Baptists entered the industrial areas belatedly, if at all. This was so in both East and West. In the latter area, they did not begin work in Cleveland until 1848 although they had started preaching in Ohio as early as 1810; Chicago was not invaded until 1865 even though Illinois had been entered in 1842. In the East the same picture developed. Boston had a church in 1844 but Providence was neglected until 1863; Portland, Maine, had a witness as early as 1843 and Augusta seven years later. The church in Concord, New Hampshire, was begun in 1844, in Portsmouth in 1852, and Manchester in 1867.

This belated entrance into urban areas was due largely to the rural ethos of the Freewill Baptist constituency. This meant that few of their leaders were adequately trained to lead successfully the city churches. Nealy, one of the better prepared among them, recognized this when he wrote back from Buffalo, New York, where he had stopped *en route* to Michigan. He pleaded:

O we want more talents . . . more learning, more literary acquirements, more depth and scope of theological knowledge . . . in order to cope with those combined powers of scepticism and papacy which are found to be most prevalent in our larger towns and cities.⁴³

Amos Sutton was of the same opinion. He criticized the failure of the Freewill Baptists to enter the cities and blamed it on their lack of competent leadership. His concluding arrow was: "If you had had a learned and efficient ministry, the Freewill Baptists might have been as powerful a denomination as any in the United States."⁴⁴ This was in 1835!

About the time that the Freewill Baptists tardily began to

⁴² *Twelfth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society* (Dover, 1846), p. 16.

⁴³ *Morning Star*, September 16, 1835.

⁴⁴ *Morning Star*, June 24, 1835.

make amends for their failure in this regard, the financial panic of 1857 reduced the resources available for such purposes. In 1860 the Corresponding Secretary of the Home Mission Society reported:

... for the last four years, the sphere of operations of this Society has been considerably diminished. Its resources have been smaller than they were for several years. About all that the Society has been able to do since the great financial crisis in 1857 has been to keep and cultivate the grounds which it then occupied—without lengthening its cords or enlarging its boundaries.⁴⁵

This statement of retrenchment is borne out by the fact that only eight churches were aided in 1857, compared to twenty-seven in 1854. Then too, the interest in the freedmen, which began about 1863, siphoned off most of the funds that ordinarily would have been available for home mission work.

This failure to penetrate the urban areas because of limited resources and cultural disparity was in large part responsible for the failure of the Freewill Baptists to emerge as a major American denomination.

Motivation. The Freewill Baptists were not unique in moving westward. Other groups had preceded them. In 1826 the American Home Mission Society was organized in New York in which Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Dutch Reformed and Associated Reformed churches all co-operated.⁴⁶ With such a large constituency it was possible for them to contribute more than \$20,000 the first year compared to the \$5,000 given by the Freewill Baptists in the first ten years. The Baptist Home Mission Society was organized in 1832, and the first year it employed fifty missionaries as compared with the one part-time missionary of the Freewill Baptists.⁴⁷ The Methodist organization of 1819 and the Protestant Episcopal

⁴⁵ *Twenty-sixth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society* (Dover, 1860), p. 3.

⁴⁶ W. W. Sweet, *Religion in the Development of American Culture* (New York, 1952), p. 263.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

formation in 1821 were both inclusive in their outlook, embracing both foreign and domestic work.

The dominant impulse behind this total programme of the American churches in moving westward is readily apparent. There was an almost universal recognition of the importance of the Mississippi Valley for the future well-being of America. Lyman Beecher spoke for many when he wrote:

It is equally plain that the religious and political destiny of our nation is to be decided in the West. There is territory and there soon will be the population, the wealth, and the political power. . . . The West is destined to be the great central power of the nation and, under heaven, must affect powerfully the cause of free institutions and the liberty of the world.⁴⁸

The Freewill Baptists reflected this recognition of the crucial import of the West when they said:

The rapidity and extent to which it has populated . . . the important influence it is apparently destined . . . to exercise upon the government, the morals and religion of this whole nation—the prevalent destitution of Christian institutions and gospel ministry and the active exertions of the pope of Rome, with other tyrants of Europe to introduce, establish, and extend the Roman Catholic influence and power—are circumstances which have awakened in evangelical Christians and patriots generally, a lively interest in the promotion of evangelical religion in the western valley.⁴⁹

This statement informs us that the Freewill Baptists also shared another stimulus of the entire westward movement of the churches. This was the fear that the Pope might gain control of the "Great Valley." The presence of the Leopold Association and the Association for the Propagation of the Faith had stirred the country and support for home missions was urged on the basis that only the Gospel could "save

⁴⁸ *Plea for the West* (Cincinnati, 1835), p. 11.

⁴⁹ *Third Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society* (Dover, 1837), p. 3.

the west from the Pope."⁵⁰ Nealy was of this opinion when he said that only the preaching of salvation through Christ could "shed light on the recesses of the convent and cloister" and expose "the deadly worship of priestcraft."⁵¹ Sutton attempted to spur the Freewill Baptists to greater efforts in the West when he wrote:

Infidelity is assuming unusual boldness, popery is turning the wealth and influence of foreign powers to seize the rising population and soon it will be too late to save the west.⁵²

The Freewill Baptists were prompted, as were the other denominations, to evangelize the West in order to raise the moral tone of the area and refute the forces of infidelity.⁵³ Frontier descriptions were painted graphically by Nealy:

The state of society is very loose. Professed Christians . . . are now stupid, manifesting very little concern whether there is a meeting in their neighbourhood or not. The Sabbath is much profaned by them and by the people generally by visiting, hunting, and such like amusements.⁵⁴

Goodykoontz's description of frontier life in its more lurid aspects bears out what Nealy has said. Greed, lust, immorality and drunkenness were all prominent on the frontier, but not to the exclusion of the virtues of thrift, industry and honesty.⁵⁵ The social and moral needs of the frontier were made the basis of another appeal by Nealy.

This [the Gospel] can dash the intoxicating bowls to atoms. This can unnerve the cruel arm of the taskmaster and bid the

⁵⁰ R. A. Billington, *The Protestant Crusade 1800-1860, a study in the origins of American nativism* (New York, 1952), entitled chapter five "Saving the West from the Pope." See also Billington, "Anti-Catholic Propaganda and the Home Mission Movement," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXII (1935), 361-384. C. B. Goodykoontz, *Home Missions on the American Frontier* (Caldwell, Idaho, 1939), pp. 25-40, has an excellent summary of motivation for the entire westward movement. See pp. 221-238 for the Roman Catholic picture.

⁵¹ *Morning Star*, August 20, 1834.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Goodykoontz, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-29.

⁵⁴ *Morning Star*, August 16, 1837.

⁵⁵ Goodykoontz, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28.

slave whip fall lifeless from his iron fist. . . . This can fertilize that vast moral garden which lies between the Arctic Zone and the southern gulf, the Allegheny heights and the Rocky Mountains.⁵⁶

While the Freewill Baptists shared some of the stimuli which prompted the evangelization of the west by all denominations, there were other motives which they held uniquely. One of these was the desire to proclaim the Gospel to all men since Christ died for all. David Marks was the most zealous advocate of this doctrine and the accompanying necessity of home missions. He explicated Matthew 28:19-20 as follows:

First, God has commanded that the gospel be preached to every creature. Second, this command is not obligatory on merely a few individuals but is directly or indirectly binding on every individual in the whole church. Third, every man has his own proper calling of God—all men are not called to preach personally, but while one does this, others are called to uphold his hands by supporting him and in doing it, they do not give to the preacher, but only do themselves, by exchange, what God has commanded them to do.⁵⁷

In this way Marks put it squarely upon the shoulders of every Freewill Baptist to do his share in obeying God's command. In another place the same message was voiced when the Corresponding Secretary of the Home Mission Society declared that "all persons living in the light have a sphere allotted to them to pluck souls as brands from the burning" because their "light" was that Christ died for all and therefore is not willing that any should perish.⁵⁸ It would be difficult to overestimate the power and effectiveness of this appeal of Freewill Baptist leaders to act consistently with their belief in the availability of salvation for all.

The other unique incentive that the Freewill Baptists had

⁵⁶ *Second Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society* (Dover, 1836), p. 8.

⁵⁷ Marks, *op. cit.*, p. 335.

⁵⁸ *Second Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society*, p. 8.

for preaching throughout the West was that of preparation for the end time. The dreaded conflict of Christ's Church with the Prince of Darkness was near, so they were convinced.

The armies on either side are marshalling and arraying themselves. Anti-Christ, the Man of Sin is sending forth everywhere his pervading emissaries, and is pushing forward his purposes. . . . We think we discern in the light of Holy Prophecy and in the indications of Providence and in the motions and conditions of the kingdoms of the earth—the near approach of that last and most dreadful conflict between the militant Church of Christ and the spiritual and embodied forces of the Prince of Darkness. Many things conspire to induce us to think that America, North America, is destined to be the theatre of the deadliest and most decisive part of this universal conflict.⁵⁹

It was unnecessary to add that money was needed for the coming battle, but the report continued that, in this light, the "object of this Society is a glorious object." The appeal concluded: "Yes, brethren, we live in the last time. What we do for the conversion of the world must soon be done."⁶⁰

EDUCATION

The first Freewill Baptist educational institution was Parsonsfield Academy, founded in North Parsonsfield, Maine, in 1832 by John Buzzell. Buzzell's interest in higher education was kindled by the desire to provide the young people of the denomination an opportunity for schooling which would not simultaneously draw them away from the Freewill Baptist fold. As such, the Academy did not provide theological but only general education.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* The Freewill Baptists did not share the economic motivation of some of the eastern churchmen. Goodykoontz, *op. cit.*, p. 35, depicted this incentive graphically when he quoted a Boston preacher of 1864 as saying: "They know that bonds and stocks and mortgages are all the more valuable for being within the sound of the church-going bell."

Other schools of a similar nature followed. The Austin, first known as the Strafford, Academy was founded by the New Durham Quarterly Meeting in 1834. The Rhode Island Freewill Baptists were responsible for the establishment of the Smithville Seminary in North Scituate in 1839.

While these schools were adequate to train the youth seeking a general education, there was still lacking an institution to provide theological instruction for prospective ministers. This lacuna meant that promising Freewill Baptist youths were being trained in the seminaries of other denominations and often they ultimately were lost to the Freewill Baptists. Without a ministry adequate in both numbers and training, the Freewill Baptist work suffered. Recognizing this, John Chaney, Silas Curtis, Dexter Waterman, and John J. Butler conferred together throughout the fall of 1839. They decided that some action was necessary to correct the prevailing situation and so they issued a call in *The Morning Star* of December 11, 1839, for a convention "for the purpose of adopting measures for providing the means of Biblical instruction for pious young men who promise usefulness to the Church." The meeting was held at Acton, Maine, on January 15, 1840, and from it emerged the Freewill Baptist Education Society.

The Society was opposed from the first by John Buzzell and his followers, soon known as the Buzzellites. They were opposed to any preparation for the ministry, other than the call of God, and they appealed to Randall for support.⁶¹ The Buzzellites wanted a ministry "untouched by human hands."⁶² They cited Leviticus 8, where Aaron was made a priest by God, a text often used by Randall.

In answer to this opposition, the Education Society passed the resolution that "no man, whatever may be his natural

⁶¹ In this Buzzell misinterpreted Randall. The latter never spoke against education of the clergy in addition to the conviction that God had appointed a man His minister, but only as a substitute for the divine induction.

⁶² "The Freewill Baptists and Elder John Buzzell," a typescript by an unknown author in the Anthony papers, Dexter.

or acquired attainments, can preach the Gospel unless he has been called of God to that work."⁶³ As a further rejoinder the Society denied that they intended to found a seminary in the traditional sense of requiring a stated period of study before graduation. They said that they were merely setting up the means of acquiring a theological education and a student could come and stay as long as he wished. In this same vein there would be no entrance requirements.⁶⁴ All that they intended to do, they pleaded, was to provide the means whereby a man, already called of God, might learn the Bible.⁶⁵ They argued that such facilities were needed.

The facilities of education being no longer limited to a favoured few, intelligence is already become and becoming the noble acquisition of all classes in the nation. All this has an intimate connection with the intellectual qualifications of the ministry. . . . The generation forthcoming upon the stage will inevitably demand an intelligent class of men as their religious teachers and spiritual guides.⁶⁶

The first concrete work of the Education Society was the establishment of the theological department in conjunction with Parsonsfield Academy in September 1840. Moses M. Smart served as its principal. As a result of the opposition led by John Buzzell, the Biblical School, as it soon became known, moved to Dracut, Massachusetts, now Lowell, in 1842. In the three years there the student body increased from its original eight to twenty-six and the faculty soon numbered seven, including two lecturers and the librarian. The catalogue for 1843, the oldest issue now extant, proudly asserted that the school was designed for college graduates but added

⁶³ *Third Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Education Society* (Dover, 1843), p. 13.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁶⁵ *Fourth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Education Society* (Dover, 1844), p. 5.

⁶⁶ *Eighth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Education Society* (Dover, 1848), p. 6.

that others without such preparation would be admitted.⁶⁷ It urged all such to prepare themselves, before admittance, in such fields as mathematics, history, philosophy and composition. The first year at the school was spent in the Greek and Hebrew languages, Biblical introduction and interpretation. The next year included courses in theology and philosophy and the third year of study embraced homiletics and church history.⁶⁸

In 1844 the School moved again, this time into affiliation with the Whitestown Seminary at Whitesboro, New York, at the invitation of the Whitestown trustees. The ten years spent at Whitesboro are rather revealing in the changes that took place there. Rather than carrying out the pretentious programme of educating college graduates, "those who had not a thorough knowledge of English grammar" were admitted. The stiff Greek and Hebrew grammar requirements of Lowell days were made optional. Chronologically they were now put at the end of the three-year course, which practically nullified them, inasmuch as few students remained for the full three years.⁶⁹ The sojourn at Whitestown was significant from another standpoint because it was here that John J. Butler and Joseph Fullonton, both of whom were to be prominent later, began their teaching careers.

As early as 1850 there was some consideration given to removing the Biblical School from the New York location because of the illness that had prevailed among the student body. In 1853 it was discussed again, and by 1854 the move became a reality with the transfer to New Hampton, New

⁶⁷ Actually, only five of the first 157 men to study at the School had college degrees. *Twelfth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Education Society* (Dover, 1852), p. 11.

⁶⁸ This curriculum, both in content and chronological placing, was identical with that of Andover Theological Seminary in nearby Andover. Henry Rowe, *History of Andover Theological Seminary* (Newton, Mass., 1933), pp. 26, 59-60. Undoubtedly the claim to prepare college graduates was also influenced by Andover.

⁶⁹ Of the first 157 men to study at the School, only six stayed the full three years; twenty took the regular course of study which probably meant the prescribed courses; 103 stayed for one year or less.

Hampshire, the home of the New Hampton Institute.⁷⁰ The arrangement between the two schools was that the Institute would provide a building where the theological classes could meet, while the theologists would rent their living quarters from the Institute. The curriculum did not change during this period and the student body remained fairly constant at around twenty.

By 1870 the school was relocated for the fifth and final time when it returned to the State that had given it birth. In that year it became a part of the Bates College campus, was renamed Cobb Divinity School in 1887, and was discontinued permanently in 1908.⁷¹

While we have dealt almost exclusively with the Biblical School, primarily because it was the sole concern of the Education Society, it would be erroneous to imply from the narrative that Freewill Baptist educational interests were limited to it. Reference has already been made to three other early institutions of the Freewill Baptists, as well as the New Hampton Institute.⁷² In addition to these, there were other schools worth notice. Geauga Seminary was founded in Ohio in 1844 by Ransom Dunn and A. K. Moulton. David Marks

⁷⁰ The New Hampton Institute had had, even then, a long and varied history. Originally, in 1820, John K. Simpson offered the Freewill Baptists land for the purpose of starting a school in New Hampton. But this offer was premature, and the Freewill Baptists scorned Simpson's generosity. Simpson was not to be so lightly pushed aside, and opened his own school in 1821. Through mismanagement and other troubles, the school did not prosper, and when the Calvinistic Baptists offered to buy the school, Simpson was ready to sell. They assumed control in 1825 and continued its operation until 1852. At that time they relinquished the school and Colonel R. G. Lewis offered to aid the Freewill Baptists in its purchase and operation. The Freewill Baptists, having come a long way from 1820 as far as educational matters were concerned, gladly accepted Lewis's aid and began operations on January 5, 1853. Thus when the Biblical School moved there in 1854 the Freewill Baptists were able to appropriate a substantial local tradition.

⁷¹ Roger Williams Hall, the home of Cobb Divinity School at Bates, now serves as an Administration Building and a men's dormitory. Dean Harry K. Rowe, of Bates College, informed me that Cobb Divinity School closed very suddenly. He entered Bates College in the fall of 1908, intending to study for the Freewill Baptist ministry at Cobb Divinity, but when the Divinity School was closed he remained as a college student.

⁷² Above, pp. 86, 87.

gave some of his time to the collection of funds for it. It is most famous as the alma mater of President James A. Garfield. It was discontinued in 1854 and the assets were transferred to Hillsdale College.

As early as 1844 Michigan Freewill Baptists had given attention to the educational needs of their area, and they opened a school in a store in Spring Arbor that year. By 1853 it was decided that the location was unfavourable, and a new and more desirable site was chosen at Hillsdale. A college was opened there in November 1855 with exceptionally good promise of support. This support materialized, and today Hillsdale is an accredited institution related to the American Baptist Convention.

Other schools which were not as well supported and some of which became defunct were Pike Seminary in New York, taken over by the Freewill Baptists from the Methodists in 1859; Cheshire Academy in Ohio, opened in 1858; Wilton Collegiate Institute, opened in Wilton, Iowa, in 1860; Lyndon Literary and Biblical Institute was begun in Lyndon, Vermont, in 1869, and Green Mountain Seminary in the same State in 1862.⁷³ Two representative collegiate institutions fathered by the Freewill Baptists, Storer and Bates, will be dealt with later.

It is now incumbent upon us to assess this obvious educational interest of the Freewill Baptists. The years from 1830 to 1850 in the United States saw a great upsurge in education all across the land, both in tax-supported educational institutions and private academies and colleges. It was the period of Horace Mann. Where public secondary schools had not yet appeared, academies rapidly increased, and often these private schools were assisted by the towns in which they were located.⁷⁴ Further, this educational awakening centred in

⁷³ J. M. Brewster *et al.*, *Centennial Record*, pp. 213-233.

⁷⁴ Maine Central Institute, founded by the Freewill Baptists in 1866 in Pittsfield, Maine, still serves as both a private preparatory school and the town high school.

New England.⁷⁵ The Freewill Baptists, in founding their academies, were merely reflecting the times in which they lived.

This same general period also witnessed the founding of numerous colleges, particularly in the Mid-West. By far the majority of these colleges were founded by ecclesiastical patrons for the purpose of training ministers who would then settle in the Mid-Western and frontier churches. D. G. Tewksbury made a study of the religious motivation behind these various schools and concluded that, with a few exceptions, most colleges were organized, supported and controlled by religious interests.⁷⁶ The only major Mid-Western school founded by the Freewill Baptists before the Civil War was Hillsdale College, but it certainly conformed to the general pattern of the day in that its design was "to send forth an army of ministers to erect the standard of gospel truth on the frontier."⁷⁷

In regard to the establishment of the Biblical School, designed solely for the preparation of ministers to the exclusion of any arts courses, it will be remembered that many of our present first-line theological seminaries had their origin in these decades.⁷⁸

The Freewill Baptists were thus again conforming to the usages of the day, moving with the general ecclesiastical stream rather than going against the current. However, it should be noted here that an interest in theological education

⁷⁵ C. R. Fish, *The Rise of the Common Man* (A History of American Life, VI: New York, 1944), p. 203. The whole tenth chapter, "Education for the People," pp. 200-227, is relevant here.

⁷⁶ Donald Tewksbury, *The Founding of American Colleges before the Civil War* (New York, 1932), p. 55.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁷⁸ Andover Theological Seminary was founded in 1808; Bangor was incorporated in 1814 and opened for instruction in 1816; Yale Divinity School was established in 1822 and Harvard created its separate Faculty of Theology in 1819. Outside of New England, the theological educational picture was much the same: Lane Theological Seminary was opened in 1832 for instruction; Union in New York dates from 1836 and the Presbyterian seminaries all had their inception between 1812 and 1829. Williston Walker, *History of the Congregational Churches in the United States* (6th ed., Boston and Chicago, 1894), pp. 348-354.

on the part of a group of Christians which were not usually considered a denomination is sometimes considered a mark of maturation into "denominationalism."⁷⁹ In this sense the Freewill Baptists might well be considered a denomination rather than a sect after 1840.

ANTI-SLAVERY

Anti-Slavery Activity. The Freewill Baptists did not confine their benevolent exertions to the religious field only, but became greatly interested in two other areas, those of slavery and temperance.

As in the case of foreign and home missions, it remained for an outsider to direct the attention of the Freewill Baptists to the cause of the slave. In this instance it was the voice of William Lloyd Garrison who first aroused Freewill Baptist interest.⁸⁰ The Freewill Baptists were very honest about their early lethargy in this enterprise but frankly stated that their early years were occupied in proclaiming free salvation and so they were no more anti-slavery than other denominations.⁸¹ Once awakened, however, they were vigorous in pressing for abolition and immediate emancipation. *The Morning Star* was their first voice to speak out against the slave-holding system. Its editorial, "Slavery and Abolition," in 1834, advocated abolition, and from that time forth its columns were open to anyone who wanted to speak on the subject.

This periodical was not the only avenue of protest that the Freewill Baptists utilized. In March 1835 the Rockingham Quarterly Meeting in New Hampshire went on record with the following resolution:

Resolved that we will, as Christians and Christian ministers, use our influence to promote the doctrine of immediate eman-

⁷⁹ Charles Braden, "What is a Sect?" *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, CCLVI (1948), 55-68.

⁸⁰ J. M. Brewster et al., *Centennial Record*, p. 191.

⁸¹ *Fifth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Anti-Slavery Society* (Dover, 1851), p. 5.

cipation; in doing which we wish to treat the oppressor and the oppressed in the spirit of the gospel.⁸²

The next official denominational action was taken at the 1835 gathering of the New Hampshire Yearly Meeting. It was an unusually well attended meeting that year because the first Freewill Baptist missionary to India, Eli Noyes, was to be ordained, and Sutton was to speak. David Marks was the spokesman for the anti-slavery cause at this meeting and his plea for emancipation was based largely on the natural rights of the African to freedom. These rights he predicated on the law of God which made all men free. He censured the American churches for their indifference in the matter of slavery and went on to urge the adoption of the following:

Whereas the system of slavery is contrary to the law of nature and the law of God, and is a violation of the dearest rights of man, Therefore resolved that the principles of immediate abolition are derived from the unerring Word of God and that no political circumstances whatever can exonerate Christians from exerting all their moral influence for the suppression of this heinous sin.⁸³

After Marks, Jonathan Woodman next arose to speak, and seconded Marks's resolution, which was later passed unanimously. In his remarks, Woodman appealed to the patriotism of his hearers, saying that God "will scourge us for our sins, and I have long trembled for my country while I have remembered that God is just."⁸⁴

This action of the New Hampshire Yearly Meeting had a widespread influence on the denomination, largely because of the publication of Marks's and Woodman's speeches in *The Morning Star*. Its influence had a large bearing on the action of the next General Conference held in Byron, New York, that fall. The Conference passed five resolutions on

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁸³ *Fifth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Anti-Slavery Society*, p. 7.

⁸⁴ *Minutes of the General Conference of the Freewill Baptist Connection* (Dover, 1859), I, 123.

the subject. In sum they were as follows: the first recognized slavery as "an unjust infringement on the dearest rights of the slave" which will "ultimately result in the ruin of our country"; the second urged "Christian patriots and philanthropists" to procure the abolition of the evil; the third said that discussion of the issue was needed; the fourth urged that Christians pray to the end that abolition be accomplished, and the fifth expressed the gratitude of the denomination that it was so "generally united in our view of the distracting subject of slavery."⁸⁵

This was the first official action of the denomination as such, and after it almost all of the Yearly and Quarterly Meetings took approximately the same stand.⁸⁶ In 1837 the Rockingham Quarterly Meeting passed a resolution approving "the principles, measures and objects of the American Anti-Slavery Society."⁸⁷ In the three short years from the time of the first *Morning Star* editorial in 1834 to approval of the programme of the American Anti-Slavery Society the Free-will Baptists had unequivocally stated their position in favour of immediate emancipation.

However, it is not to be supposed that this early and unwavering platform was without opposition. The first protest raised against it came from within the ranks. It took the form of a boycott of *The Morning Star*, and for two years after 1834 the subscription list declined appreciably. The cry of those opposed to the *Star*'s policy was that it was "meddling with politics" and that it was abandoning its spiritual purposes. Concomitantly the economic depression took a further toll of subscribers, so that by 1837 the *Star* was in a very precarious position. The serious situation provoked a continuous day and night session of the trustees to decide whether or not the *Star* would continue to favour abolition. Finally the vote came, with only one dissenting voice, that the present course would be continued.

⁸⁵ *Minutes of General Conference*, I, 123-125.

⁸⁶ *Fifth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Anti-Slavery Society*, p. 9.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

But more opposition soon appeared. The action of the Rockingham Quarterly Meeting in passing the resolution favouring the American Anti-Slavery Society was protested by several Freewill Baptist ministers and laymen in New Hampshire. They wrote an open letter to the *New Hampshire Patriot* in which they charged the Quarterly Meeting with inconsistency in using political measures to accomplish a religious end, and they added that they did not feel at all obliged to support the resolution. This group continued its fight to the floor of the next General Conference held in Conneaut, Ohio, in 1839.⁸⁸ They asked for the opinion of the Conference on the Rockingham resolution and they also protested the policy of *The Morning Star* on the whole slavery question, saying that they felt it had "descended from a religious to a political course."⁸⁹ The whole matter was referred to the committee of the Conference on slavery. The committee reported out as follows: "Resolved that this Conference, believing the anti-slavery cause to be the cause of God, recommend to every Christian and every Christian minister to use all proper means to promote its interest."⁹⁰ At the same time, the committee voted to approve the course of action taken by *The Morning Star*.⁹¹

While these two resolutions passed by the Conneaut Conference were significant, they were overshadowed by another event. William M. Housley, a minister of the Calvinistic Baptist churches in Kentucky, came to the Conference with a request for ordination by the Freewill Baptists. He stated that he differed from his former associates on the matter of doctrine, agreeing rather with the Freewill Baptists. His purpose, so he said, was to return to Kentucky, where there was a large number of Baptists who agreed with him doctrinally,

⁸⁸ Members of the group were as follows: Reverends Dyer, Kimball, Swain and True, together with the clerks of the churches at Deerfield, Chichester and Epsom, all in New Hampshire. Be it noted that none of these men or their churches were especially prominent in Freewill Baptist circles at any time.

⁸⁹ *Minutes of General Conference*, I, 160.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

and lead them into fellowship with the Freewill Baptists.⁹² The Conference heard Housley and voted to have a committee confer with him and then report back to Conference. The committee interviewed Housley and in the course of the meeting, discovered that he was a slave holder. He justified his position by saying that he provided better for his slaves than they could provide for themselves. The committee asked him to relinquish his slaves with the promise that the denomination would give them a home and an education in the North. Housley refused, unless he would be reimbursed \$2,000 for his loss. Thereupon the committee decided "that as Dr. Housley claimed property in human beings, they could not ordain him as a minister, nor fellowship with him as a Christian; and he was so informed."⁹³ The Conference declared that this action was "highly satisfactory."

After this action, the course of the Freewill Baptist opposition to slavery was an open one. Nothing that was really controversial arose until 1850 when the General Conference met at Providence, Rhode Island. The Fugitive Slave Act had just been made a law of the land. When the Conference convened, a coloured Freewill Baptist pastor was in the city and he was invited to address the Conference. In his message, he asked whether or not the Conference would approve the purpose of the fugitives and defend them from their pursuers, who were even then in the city seeking runaways. At the close of his message, he announced himself as a fugitive slave. Immediately the Conference was all astir, and, after lively debate, a committee was appointed to bring in resolutions. After their report, the Conference took the following actions: first, it quoted Deuteronomy 23:15: "Thou shalt not deliver unto his master the servant which is escaped from his master unto thee"; secondly, it resolved "that we do deliberately and calmly . . . deny any and all obligation . . . to submit to the unrighteous enactments of the aforesaid Fugitive Slave Bill."⁹⁴

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

After citing the provisions of the 1850 law, the Conference took more drastic steps. They deliberately flouted the law when they said :

. . . regardless of unjust human enactments, fines and imprisonments, we will do all we can consistently with the claims of the Bible to prevent the recapture of the fugitive and to aid him in his efforts to escape from his rapacious claimants.⁹⁵

They went even further when they declared their willingness to suffer the unrighteous penalties for disobedience rather than obey the law. Their words were: "the only obedience we will render to said Fugitive Slave Law shall be to suffer its penalties."⁹⁶ They climaxed their resolves with the encouragement to the slaves "to use all the means to preserve their liberty that religion, conscience and reason will justify under their harassing and distressing circumstances."⁹⁷ Their final action was to petition Congress to repeal the Fugitive Slave Law.⁹⁸

The Freewill Baptist organization devoted to the cause of the slave's freedom was the Anti-Slavery Society, organized in 1842.⁹⁹ Its purpose was to inform the people of the evils of slavery and of the sin of slaveholding, and "how it is inconsistent with a professedly republican government" and how "it marks the honour of our nation."¹⁰⁰ We do not know how the Society proceeded to accomplish its purpose. Supposedly it would do it by means of literature and publication but inasmuch as no Society report carried a financial statement, we

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Fifth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Anti-Slavery Society*, p. 27.

⁹⁷ *Minutes of General Conference*, I, 339.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 340. We do not know the name of the fugitive who addressed the Conference.

⁹⁹ The first report that we have is dated 1847. Its functions for the first five years were largely confined to holding a meeting at the time when the other benevolent societies met, so as to "keep the fires of freedom burning on every Free Baptist altar." *Fifth Annual Report of the Free-will Baptist Anti-Slavery Society*, p. 21. Hence no report would be necessary.

¹⁰⁰ *Sixth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Anti-Slavery Society* (Dover, 1852), p. 21.

may assume that all its early efforts were oral.¹⁰¹ Whatever the exact method, the results were phenomenal for by 1853 the Society was able to report that among the 50,000 Freewill Baptists, there was not a single slaveholder.¹⁰² Beyond that, no Quarterly or Yearly Meeting had ever passed a vote favourable to slavery up until that year.¹⁰³

Evidently the Freewill Baptists anti-slavery efforts prior to the Civil War at least, were largely among themselves, for they complained that their efforts had not been recognized by others.¹⁰⁴ Because of this lack of recognition, J. J. Butler asked for a report from the churches and meetings as to what was being done. The answers he received from all the meetings and churches were that the clergy were unanimously opposed to slavery, as well as the majority of the people. However, some of the members had not yet endorsed the position of immediate emancipation.¹⁰⁵

Although we do not know the exact method of reaching the people in the interests of abolition, we do know the methods that the Freewill Baptists proposed to use to eradicate the system. Writing in 1840, Butler stated that "if slavery is ever to be abolished it must be effected by legislative action and it will never be done until there are men in office who are friendly to abolition."¹⁰⁶ This view of the ballot box as the means to bring about reform was very poignantly stated when he said: "When great moral questions are to be decided by the election of particular men, it may be as much the Christian's duty to vote as it is to pray."¹⁰⁷ Butler went on to denounce force as a means of effecting reform and advocated only moral measures. Once more people were urged to enlist

¹⁰¹ From 1844 to 1847 the Society had received only \$22.47 in contributions. This was their total income for that period. *First Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Anti-Slavery Society* (Dover, 1847), p. 22.

¹⁰² *Seventh Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Anti-Slavery Society* (Dover, 1853), p. 4.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁰⁶ *Thoughts on the Benevolent Enterprise* (Dover, 1840), p. 136.

¹⁰⁷ *Fifth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Anti-Slavery Society*, p. 24. Butler was the Corresponding Secretary for that year.

in the cause, so that public sentiment could be corrected, intercommunication with the South established, and Congress petitioned; then, said Butler, victory will come.¹⁰⁸

The Freewill Baptists took concrete action in yet another way. The Foreign Mission Society voted in 1841 not to receive contributions or aid in any form from slaveholders.¹⁰⁹ This was also true of the Home Mission Society.¹¹⁰

Motivation. The next legitimate question in this discussion of the Freewill Baptist anti-slavery movement is, what compelled them to take this stand? What was there in their theology, if anything, that brought them to their position? The answer to these questions is that their motivation was actually three-fold: one, it was patriotic; two, it was theological, and three, it was humanitarian.

The first annual report abounds with the substantiation of the first part of their motivation. It called slavery "a question which involves our most brilliant national prospects and even our very national existence."¹¹¹ The support for this statement was given by citing the relative prosperity of the North and the South. For example, the report said, since 1803 Ohio had grown in population faster than had South Carolina, which proved that the latter State had been deterred by slavery! Further, the manufactured goods of the North in 1846 were valued at \$42,000,000; of the South, at only \$3,000,000. This again proved that the North had advanced more than the South, and this because of the absence of slavery.¹¹² Again, the South was behind the North in the matter of the number of teachers and the amount of printed material produced and this, too, was because of slavery.¹¹³ Slavery, the report con-

¹⁰⁸ *Op. cit.*, pp. 132-134.

¹⁰⁹ *Fifth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Foreign Mission Society*, p. 20.

¹¹⁰ *Eighth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society* (Dover, 1842), p. 23.

¹¹¹ *First Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Anti-Slavery Society*, p. 4.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

cluded, had been proven to be scourge which affected the ruin" and must by all means be deleted from the total scene.

The theological motivation for the abolitionist cause was pointed out by Butler when he said that slavery was an institution "which takes man, made in the image of God, . . . having immortal spirits, and converts him into an article of merchandise. . . ." ¹¹⁴ A. K. Moulton called slavery a sin in the sight of God and exhorted his hearers to rebuke it. If we do not do our duty in this matter, Moulton said, "we are guilty of blood of slaughtered humanity."¹¹⁵ The Freewill Baptists were so sure that their cause was theologically grounded that they asserted on one occasion that slavery was doomed because "God has signed its death-warrant with his own hand."¹¹⁶ They felt too, that if they did not prosecute their cause with zeal that God would not bless them. "We cannot reasonably expect that genuine revivals will flourish while the church . . . is so deeply involved in the guilt of slavery."¹¹⁷ Looking back in retrospect from the year 1851, they were certain that *The Morning Star* subscription list had risen from 1,700 in 1832 to 9,000 in 1850 because of its policy to oppose slavery.¹¹⁸ In brief, to Freewill Baptists, the cause of abolition was the cause of God.

In regard to the impetus stemming from humanitarian considerations, the Freewill Baptists cited the case studies, journals, reports, and diaries of their day to show that the slave was being maltreated by his master, in spite of the slaveholders' protests to the contrary. Butler's work is the foremost example of the humanitarian pulse. He took twenty-seven pages to quote extensively from the book on slavery

¹¹⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 83.

¹¹⁵ *Second Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Anti-Slavery Society: A Peep at a Peculiar Institution* (Dover, 1848), p. 7.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹¹⁷ *Twelfth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society*, p. 7.

¹¹⁸ *Fifth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Anti-Slavery Society*, pp. 27-28.

written by a Methodist minister in Marlboro, Massachusetts, which depicted Negro suffering.¹¹⁹

Other Anti-Slavery Efforts. We must now compare the record of Freewill Baptists on anti-slavery with that of other denominations before the Civil War. All denominations were alert to the needs of working among the Negroes. The Episcopal Church did some work among the slaves in connection with their regular parish work. In some cities, like New York and Philadelphia, they established regular and separate negro churches.¹²⁰ Among the slaves on the plantations, there was a lack of Episcopal clergymen to preach to the slaves, so pious Episcopalian slaveholders hired ministers of other denominations to do the work.¹²¹

The Methodist Church was even more active in the work among the slaves. The first formal appointments of missionaries to the slaves in 1808 but interest in the work antedates these appointments. By 1845 the Methodists claimed 150,120 slaves as members of their denomination.¹²²

Through its home mission society, the Congregationalists also worked among the slaves in this period.¹²³

But working among the slaves and taking a stand for their emancipation were two different measures. The Episcopal Church did not take an official position on the subject, although there were some abolitionist clergymen. It was largely because of this non-committal policy that their Church did not divide on the slavery question. On the other hand, the Methodists, Presbyterians and the Baptists all divided before the Civil War because they could not agree on the matter of not just emancipation, but whether or not slavery

¹¹⁹ Butler, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-109.

¹²⁰ W. W. Manross, *A History of the American Episcopal Church* (New York, 1935), p. 265; E. C. Chorley, *Men and Movements in the American Episcopal Church* (New York, 1946), p. 247; Manross, *The Episcopal Church in the United States 1800-1840* (New York, 1938), p. 130.

¹²¹ Manross, *The Episcopal Church in the United States*, pp. 110-111.

¹²² W. C. Barclay, *History of Methodist Missions: Early American Methodism (1769-1844)* (2 vols., New York, 1949), I, 267-271.

¹²³ Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 383.

was a sin. A glance at their histories prior to the Civil War will afford us a basis of comparison with the Freewill Baptists.

Immediately after the Revolution, the Methodist Church took a decidedly anti-slavery position. The General Conference of 1796 passed several strong resolutions against the "complicated crime" of slavery. One of these called for the immediate exclusion from the society of one who sold a slave. Another made it impossible for a slaveholder to join the society until the preacher who had oversight in the district could speak to him about his slaveholding. By 1800 there were those who wanted to put more teeth into the resolutions by barring from membership any slaveholder and by providing for the emancipation of the children of slaves by forcing all slaveholding members to release them for educational purposes. These resolutions were voted down and a silence on slavery settled over Methodism until 1836. Up until this Conference, no bishop took an aggressive stand against slavery and no nationally known preacher in Methodism was a friend of abolition.¹²⁴

The General Conference of 1836 held in Cincinnati brought the slavery matter to the front again. Two of the members of Conference, who were from New England, addressed the Cincinnati Anti-Slavery Society and the Conference voted to censure them for their activity. Then the Conference went on record as being "opposed to modern abolitionism." By 1840 the General Conference was willing to declare that slaveholding "constituted no legal barrier to the election or ordination of ministers."¹²⁵

Thus it is clear that the pro-slavery proponents among the Methodists held sway from the turn of the century until 1840. During these years the opposition to slavery was purely localized and advocated only by particular individuals. Even the New England Conference was quiescent on the subject.¹²⁶ During the 1830's the pamphlet warfare on the controversy

¹²⁴ Barclay, *op. cit.*, II, 84.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 90.

began to have its effect among Methodists as among others. The secular press, led by Garrison's *Liberator*, made inroads on the pro-slavery men, Methodists included. Finney's revivals, which numbered the conversion of Theodore Weld among its achievements, helped the cause of abolition. The Lane Seminary stir brought more support. All of these factors helped to bring into action the local Methodist preachers who were abolitionists but who had found no sympathizers up until this time. Gradually their ranks swelled until, in 1843, the first break came within Methodist ranks. That year, at Utica, New York, the Wesleyan Methodist Church was formed, largely over the slavery controversy. This defection served as a catalytic agent in fomenting the momentous division of 1844 in New York City when the entire church divided.¹²⁷

The story of abolition among the Baptists is similar to that of the Methodists. The first Baptist action on the subject that we have record of came at the time of the Missouri Compromise. That year the Vincent Baptist Church in Chester Springs, Pennsylvania, inquired of the Philadelphia Association if it would not be consistent with both sound policy and Christianity for the Association to plan for the emancipation of slaves. The Association was not willing to commit itself and so sidetracked the matter. By 1832 this policy of silence did not satisfy some churches around Philadelphia and so they withdrew from the Association in 1832 and formed a new and independent association.¹²⁸

Elsewhere the Baptist voice on the matter was clearer. In Maine, two Baptist associations took positive anti-slavery positions. The Hancock Association in 1836 declared that "the slave system is the most abominable of all the systems of iniquity." The Washington Association voted to have no fellowship "with those who advocate and practice its [slavery's] abomination and thus defile the Church of

¹²⁷ Barclay, *op. cit.*, II, 97.

¹²⁸ Robert Torbet, *Social History of the Philadelphia Baptist Association: 1707-1940* (Philadelphia, 1944), pp. 96-97.

God."¹²⁹ While there were early Baptist advocates of abolition in the North, particularly in Maine, the majority of Baptists preferred not to become involved in the matter. Those who took this position said that Christ gave no instructions to political organizations. Among the most famous of these pacifiers was Francis Wayland, president of Brown University from 1827 to 1855. He wrote Garrison a letter in 1831 in which he stated why he did not want the *Liberator* sent to him. While he felt slavery was wicked and destructive, he said, he felt also that immediate emancipation such as the *Liberator* advocated was not the answer.¹³⁰

This mediating position held by the majority of the Baptists was maintained until 1840. That year the American Baptist Anti-Slavery Convention met in New York City, the result of the fusion of radical Baptist abolitionists and some Burma missionaries. The Convention proceeded to form a missionary committee which set out immediately to agitate for abolition. To accomplish their designs, they asked the official national Baptist body of the day, the General Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States for Foreign Missions, to refuse contributions from slaveholders and to break fellowship with Southern Baptist churches. At the next meeting of the General Convention, in Baltimore in 1841, it voted to continue in union with the Southern slaveholding churches, and the Southerners went away gleeful. But trouble was at hand. Widespread criticism of the Baltimore Convention was quick to form and by 1843 enough abolitionist Baptists had been aroused to form the American and Foreign Baptist Missionary Society. Consequently when the next General Convention met in Philadelphia in 1844, a struggle was inevitable. Again it was resolved by a vote to remain neutral on the subject of slavery inasmuch as its primary purpose was foreign missions, not domestic quarrels. A year later, however, the cleavage came. That year the Anti-

¹²⁹ Mary Putnam, *The Baptists and Slavery, 1840-1845* (Ann Arbor, 1913), p. 16.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

Slavery Convention succeeded in forcing the Board of Managers of the General Convention to state to some Georgia Baptists who had presented a slaveholder as a missionary candidate that they "could not appoint as a missionary one who was a slaveholder."¹³¹ This precipitated the further decision that the Baptist Home Mission Society should carry on its work in two separate groups, North and South. The only obvious answer by the South was the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845 and, in retaliation, the General Convention changed its name to the American Missionary Union the next year and the split was complete.¹³²

The slavery struggle among the Congregationalists and some Presbyterians centred around Charles Finney and Lyman Beecher. As is well known, Finney advocated to his converts that they not only believe, but also work. He turned as many as possible into paths of usefulness to the world, rather than escape from it. One of these so directed was Theodore Weld, a brilliant young man who enrolled at Lane Seminary to prepare for the ministry. At Lane, Weld gathered about himself other students who were interested in the cause of abolition. The outcome of student discussions was the famous debate at the seminary in the winter of 1833-34 at which time the students decided overwhelmingly to adopt the policy of "immediate emancipation gradually accomplished."

Beecher, without too much consideration of the matter, did not fully understand the qualifying phrase, and neither did his trustees. At their spring meeting, they voted that the students must cease discussing abolition or leave the seminary. They chose the latter course and went to Oberlin where they were promised the right to discuss the slavery question in any light they saw fit. Out from Oberlin went Weld and his associates and it was largely through their efforts that Ohio, New York, Pennsylvania, and Vermont Congregationalists and

¹³¹ Torbet, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 103.

some Presbyterians became passionate followers of the "immediate emancipation" doctrine.

Finney and Beecher had disagreed before on the matter of revivalistic methods, and they were now to disagree again. When Beecher saw his student body pick up and move to Oberlin, whence Finney was to come shortly, he became convinced that Finney's revivals were the father of abolitionism. Hence he set out to visit the Congregational General Associations in Connecticut and Massachusetts. He persuaded them to vote against abolition, that is, immediate emancipation, and he tried also to get a vote against revivals but in this latter regard he failed.

Beecher had help in closing the doors of the Congregational churches of central New England to abolitionists. Garrison, who at first had had a polite hearing, began to find doors of churches, especially Congregational churches, closed to him. This fired his anger, and he turned to his vitriolic pen to denounce the "cowardly clergy." This, of course, only blocked his path the more and so on the cycle went. Through the work of both Beecher and Garrison, the vast majority of central and southern New England Congregationalists were anti-abolitionists.¹³³

This did not pertain in northern New England, however. There, by 1840, most Congregational churches had taken a strong stand against slavery and some were in favour of immediate freedom for the slaves. They called slavery a moral and social evil and went so far as to disfellowship churches who spoke in favour of the practice. Further, they attempted to disseminate their beliefs among other denominations.¹³⁴

Among the Presbyterians, the New School General Assembly in 1846 declared that slavery was wrong and urged the churches to put away the evil of it. In this they were

¹³³ The best discussion of Finney, Beecher, Garrison and the progress of the immediate emancipation doctrine is G. H. Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse, 1830-1844* (New York, 1933), from which the above account is taken.

¹³⁴ C. M. Clark, *American Slavery and Maine Congregationalists* (Bangor, 1940), pp. 117-119.

merely following the pronouncement of the General Assembly of 1818 which had denounced slavery in the strongest terms. The New School repeated their condemnation in 1849, saying at that time "It is the duty of all Christians . . . as speedily as possible to efface this blot on our holy religion." In 1853 the General Assembly called upon the southern presbyteries to report what they had done to expurgate the slavery menace. The presbytery of Lexington, Kentucky, replied that some of its ministers, elders and members held to slavery by principle and choice, believing it to be right. In the annual conclave of 1857, the New School adopted resolutions exhorting the members to eschew doctrines such as "slavery is an ordinance of God" and expressed pain at the action of the Lexington presbytery. The southern delegates protested these actions and withdrew to form the United Synod of the South that same year.¹³⁵

The Old School did not take as strong a stand as their doctrinal antagonists, and, in 1845, they refused to call slavery an evil at all. In 1849 the General Assembly "considered it peculiarly improper and inexpedient . . . to attempt to propose measures in the work of emancipation."¹³⁶ Dr. N. L. Rice and Dr. Charles Hodge of Princeton Seminary were the leaders of the Old School in maintaining this position. This is not to say that there were not anti-slavery men in the Old School, but the mediators, who were in effect pro-slavery, dominated the scene.

We must now assess the position of the Freewill Baptists on the slavery question, having seen the stands taken by the other denominations. First of all, it will be remembered, that the major denominations of pre-Civil War days included churches in both North and South. Since, generally speaking, the pro-slavery advocates were Southerners, and the abolitionists were Northerners, it is not surprising to find that the major denominations divided over the slavery question. Then

¹³⁵ R. E. Thompson, *History of the Presbyterian Church* (American Church History Series, VI, New York, 1895), pp. 131-137.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.

it will be recalled that the Freewill Baptists were not only a Northern group, but centred mostly in northern New England, so that it is clear why they did not divide. They simply did not have any advocates of slavery in their geographic location.

Further, the centre of abolitionism, apart from the work of Theodore Weld, was in New England.

Probably nowhere in the nation were there so many reformers ripe for abolition doctrine as in New England. Remotest from slavery in distance and economic interest, they were the most deeply impressed with a sense of duty of rebuke which every inhabitant of the free states was to every slaveholder.¹³⁷

This explains why the early Methodist and Baptist abolitionists were from New England. It helps to account for the action of the Maine Congregationalists. But most telling of all, it shows that the Freewill Baptists were in the geographic centre of abolitionism and so it is not startling that they became ardent abolitionists, once they had been stirred to it by Garrison and others. It would seem to be a reasonable conclusion that the Freewill Baptists, in the matter of anti-slavery, were largely a reflection of their times and specific geographic area.

TEMPERANCE

As it might be expected, having examined the other benevolent activities of the Freewill Baptists, we discover that they were engaged also in the temperance crusades of the thirties. However, a temperance convention was not held until 1866 when it met in connection with the anniversary celebrations of the other benevolent societies. The Freewill Baptist Temperance Union was organized in 1871.

The early nineteenth-century in America was notoriously excessive in its use of alcoholic beverages. Drinking was not only widespread in public places, but it was considered inhos-

¹³⁷ Barnes, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

pitable not to offer a guest rum or something similar. It was common practice to serve "ardent spirits" at ordinations, church dedications, funerals and weddings, as well as corn-husking, elections, barn-raisings and the like.¹³⁸ In short, consumption of liquor was almost universal, both for men and women. It was not confined to any geographic area but it was usually limited to the type of beverage produced locally.

It was this rife consumption that led to reform measures. As early as 1808 a temperance society was organized in New York. In Connecticut the Congregational clergy engaged in serious temperance work about 1810 and Lyman Beecher championed the cause in that State.¹³⁹ What happened in Connecticut recurred in other States. By 1830 the temperance movement was well established; in New York State alone by that date there were 700 temperance societies.¹⁴⁰ In 1826 the American Society for the Promotion of Temperance was organized in Boston. Seven years later the United States Temperance Union was founded in Philadelphia, and after Canada was included in 1836, it became known as the American Temperance Union. By that time, there were 6,000 local societies with more than one million members in the United States. The political weight of such a grass roots movement was reflected in the organizing in 1833 of the American Congressional Temperance Society.¹⁴¹

By 1840 there arose dissension in the ranks over the question of total abstinence. The cry for teetotalism was reinforced about this time by the leadership given the cause by reformed drunkards. This kind of evangelism was especially effective and the movement, known as the Washingtonian, spread out from Baltimore, where it had its inception in 1840, to influ-

¹³⁸ Charles Keller, *op. cit.*, p. 139; see also C. R. Fish, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

¹³⁹ Keller, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

¹⁴⁰ Fish, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

¹⁴¹ For a thorough discussion of the whole temperance movement, see J. A. Krout, *The Origins of Prohibition* (New York, 1925); H. W. Blair, *The Temperance Movement* (Boston, 1884); John Marsh, *Temperance Recollections* (New York, 1866).

ence other areas of the country. Reformed drunkards became the leading evangelists for the cause.¹⁴²

This movement led into the prohibition, or compulsory abstinence, era. New York adopted a State prohibition law in 1847 but repealed it two years later. Maine, under the influence of Neal Dow, adopted prohibition in 1846, and a stronger law was passed in 1851. Some local licensing options had been exercised as early as 1827, however, and some partial restriction laws were passed in other States, such as Massachusetts in 1838.¹⁴³

By 1856 the movement, both voluntary and compulsory, seemed to have accomplished a marked decline in alcoholic consumption but after the Civil War, during the period of reconstruction, the banner needed to be raised again. It was during this revival that the Freewill Baptists organized their Temperance Union.

However, even before the Civil War, the Freewill Baptists kept step with the local and State temperance societies. In the first volume of *The Morning Star*, in 1826, an editorial on temperance appeared. As early as the second volume, the *Star* carried a Temperance Department.¹⁴⁴ Notices of actions of other groups, secular and ecclesiastical, were reprinted in the *Star*,¹⁴⁵ as well as innumerable temperance addresses and reports of temperance societies.¹⁴⁶

Not only did the Freewill Baptists, mainly through the *Star*, keep abreast of the other temperance groups, but they urged active participation by the Freewill Baptists themselves. For example, Elder Arthur Caverno of New Hampshire,

¹⁴² Fish, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

¹⁴³ Arthur Shodwell, "Temperance," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. XXI, 14th ed.; Samuel M. Lindsay, "Prohibition," *ibid.*, XVIII. For a delightful account of the temperance, as well as the other reform movements, see E. D. Branch, *The Sentimental Years, 1836-1860* (New York, 1934), *passim*.

¹⁴⁴ *Morning Star*, April 16, 1828.

¹⁴⁵ For example see the issue of July 2, 1828, which printed the action of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church on alcoholism in proclaiming a day of fasting and prayer.

¹⁴⁶ *The Star* reviewed the first annual report of the American Temperance Society in the issue of March 26, 1828.

called temperance "Heaven's second best cause" and exhorted every Freewill Baptist church to become a "temperance society of itself."¹⁴⁷ The *Star* also took up the matter of abstinence and urged its readers to move on from signing a temperate drinking pledge to a pledge of total abstinence.¹⁴⁸ It also urged that the liquor traffic be defeated by such measures as shunning any who peddled or sold liquor; by refusing to employ anyone who used it; by withholding patronage from merchants who drank; by keeping children from the company of other children whose parents imbibed, and by refusing daughters in marriage to drinkers.¹⁴⁹

The General Conference was the first official body of Freewill Baptists to take any action on the temperance matter as far as we have record. In 1828 it passed a resolution by Hosea Quimby that Freewill Baptists be advised to abstain from using ardent spirits "on all occasions except when they are necessary as a medicine."¹⁵⁰ This action was later supplemented and enlarged upon by the General Conference of 1832. The resolutions adopted by that Conference included the following: personal abstinence; personal refusal to deal with those who drink; refusal to ordain any who drink; an appeal to every Yearly and Quarterly Meeting to resolve itself into a temperance society; a request that Freewill Baptist ministers speak publicly and freely on the subject, and finally, excommunication of Freewill Baptist members who, after they have been laboured with, refused to stop, not only personal use, but personal participation in the trade.¹⁵¹

The Freewill Baptist advocacy of the temperance and prohibition causes did not stop with *The Star* and the General Conference. Individuals took up the cause and of these, Elder Arthur Caverno of Enfield, New Hampshire, was the most

¹⁴⁷ *Morning Star*, February 17, 1832.

¹⁴⁸ *Morning Star*, August 24, 1832. It should be noted here that Connecticut Congregationalists had shifted to total abstinence as early as 1825. Keller, *op. cit.*, 154. The Baptists likewise adopted abstinence in 1830. *Ibid.*, 217.

¹⁴⁹ *Morning Star*, February 7, 1833.

¹⁵⁰ *Minutes of General Conference*, I, 35.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, I, 74-75.

famous. He preached against alcoholic beverages constantly and in 1833 delivered a strong denunciatory sermon against "temperate drinking." This sermon was the first one ever to be printed by the Freewill Baptist publishing house. Caverno's efforts, along with official promptings, led the Quarterly and Yearly Meetings to condemn the traffic, so that it may be said that the Freewill Baptists were as active here as in other reform causes.

In their temperance work, as in other areas of benevolent labours, the Freewill Baptists were not alone. The Methodists had taken up the cause as early as the Freewill Baptists. James Axley, Alfred Brunson and James Finley were the most noted Methodist leaders. Wilbur Fisk stormed New England in temperance work.¹⁵² The Congregational and Baptist positions have been alluded to previously.¹⁵³ The Presbyterian interest in temperance began in 1825 when Albert Barnes, who was later aided by Thomas Hunt and Robert Baird, founded a society in his Philadelphia church.¹⁵⁴

We have seen that the Freewill Baptists were active in all the significant religious crusades of the pre-Civil War period. However, it has also been noted that their efforts were in line with those of the other denominations. It is to their credit that they were so acutely aware of contemporary needs and problems. The concomitant theological proliferations will be scrutinized in the next chapter.

¹⁵² Barclay, *op. cit.*, II, 33-34.

¹⁵³ Above, p. 112, note 148.

¹⁵⁴ Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

CHAPTER IV

THEOLOGICAL INTEREST

THE FREEWILL BAPTISTS experienced the truth of what Richard Niebuhr was later to call the difficulty of perpetuating undefined beliefs,¹ and so as early as 1827 they voted at their General Conference to appoint a committee "to investigate and specify the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel as understood by this connection."² As a result of this action a *Treatise on the Faith of the Freewill Baptists* was published in 1834 and it went through numerous editions.

In addition to this formal and official embodiment of Freewill Baptist doctrine, there are other doctrinal treatises and periodical articles replete with theological significance. It is our purpose in this chapter to understand the origins of their teaching and to delineate with care their distinctive tenets.

SOURCES OF FREEWILL BAPTIST THEOLOGY

Beyond dispute, the cardinal certainty of Freewill Baptist teaching was the freedom of man's will. Once Randall had adopted that, the views of regeneration, "means," election, and perseverance fell into place. To what, then, can we attribute Randall's concept of free will?

First of all, be it remembered that Randall had only an abbreviated public school education and that he lacked theological instruction in the usual tutor-student pattern of his

¹ H. Richard Niebuhr, "Churches and Sects," *Christian Century*, July 3, 1935.

² *Minutes of the General Conference of the Freewill Baptist Connection* (Dover, 1859), I, 27.

day. The genetic account of his theology, therefore, does not follow the normal succession usually found among those trained in formal theological processes, but is similar to the indoctrination of theologically self-educated men such as Lyman Beecher and Washington Gladden.³

At the same time it will be recalled that almost from his conversion Randall began to think in terms of the salvation of others, and that following his return from military duty he preached around Portsmouth with good success and that it was his preaching and securing of converts that first attracted the "pulpit committee" of the New Durham church with the subsequent invitation to move to New Durham. All of this time Randall was unaware that his preaching contained anything contrary to the theology accepted by his fellow Baptists. Indeed, as we recall, he did not even use the terms Calvinist and Arminian.⁴

If Randall's free will views did not come from other preachers, for of their concepts he seems to have been almost totally uninformed, and if it is simply too naïve to attribute his Biblical understanding alone as the origin of his distinctive theological position, must we not turn to the other possible genesis of his beliefs, namely experience? Bear in mind that he had been a revivalist for at least three years before he was asked why he didn't preach Calvinistic election; add to that his "cornfield experience" wherein he had seen the universal love of God. The former of these two considerations led him to recognize that in frontier revivals the harsh doctrine of election was unacceptable, while the latter made the doctrine personally abhorrent. Once the issue had been raised there could be no compromise: a free will Baptist church was organized soon thereafter.⁵

³ Apart from the Scriptures, the only theological treatise that we may assume that Randall read was Henry Alline, *Two Mites Cast into the Offering of God* (Dover, 1804). This work was read after the ossifying of Randall's theology and therefore is to be considered more a reflection of his thinking than a source of it.

⁴ John Buzzell, *The Life of Elder Benjamin Randal* (Limerick, Maine, 1827), p. 73-75.

⁵ It is significant of Randall's theological lacuna that he called the

This same kind of process accounts for the presence of other free willers on the frontier. Edward Lock, licensed by the Calvinistic Baptist church of Gilmanton, went about holding revivals for two years, completely unaware that his work was doctrinally at variance with the home church. It was not until Randall came before the Gilmanton church that Lock learned that he was theologically "unsound." It would seem that John Peak was correct when he said that these frontier farmer-preachers took their Bible and began to preach as they saw it would best move their hearers.⁶ When asked why they were doctrinally heterodox, they probably learned for the first time that they were, but knew instinctively that their heterodoxy was the only view compatible with frontier revivalism.⁷

If this view is correct, it is not the only case in American Christianity where revivals have either forged or altered a man's theology. Nathaniel Taylor, the great New Haven theologian, was likewise influenced doctrinally by revivalism. Indeed, his biographer calls revival activity the "most potent influence" on his early theological formulation and the "whosoever will" of the revivalists the foundation of his theory of free agency in man.⁸ Likewise C. G. Finney, who

church he organized at New Durham "The Baptist Church of Christ at New Durham." *The Morning Star*, July 8, 1848, said that Randall and the Calvinistic Baptists united wholeheartedly in revivals in 1778 around New Durham. It was not until it came time to teach the converts that they discovered they were not agreed on certain doctrinal points and finally separated. This is strong support that experience led Randall to his position, for it would seem from this that the Calvinistic Baptists were free willers in practice, not in theory. Randall was consistent in both theory and practice.

It is noteworthy also that Randall invited Elder Samuel Shepard to travel south with him in 1799 for the purpose of holding revival meetings. This is from one of the three extant manuscript letters of Randall in the American Baptist Historical Society.

⁶ *Memoir of Elder John Peak written by himself* (Boston, 1832), pp. 19-20.

⁷ This was true of Henry Alline on the frontier in the Maritime Provinces. M. W. Armstrong, *The Great Awakening in Nova Scotia, 1776-1809* (Hartford, 1948), pp. 79-80.

⁸ S. E. Mead, *Nathaniel William Taylor, 1786-1858: A Connecticut Liberal* (Chicago, 1942), p. 125. See the entire seventh chapter, "From Old Calvinist to Taylorite," pp. 95-128.

was tutored in the Princeton theology by George Washington Gale, "made refinements" of that theology under the necessity of conforming it to the needs of society.⁹ Finney's recollection of this change was that he read and prayed much over the Bible, heard Gale on theology, and then made up his own mind.¹⁰ This is not to say that any of these men set out to adapt doctrine to human needs, but, having an acquaintance with both the Bible and society, an unconscious adaptation took place.

There seems to be further support for this account of the genesis of Randall's views of free will in the history of the theology of the other Baptists on the Maine-New Hampshire frontier. Backus informs us that the first Baptist churches in New Hampshire were formed by Hezekiah Smith, a contemporary and a colleague of his in the work at the College of Rhode Island, now Brown University.¹¹ Backus also states that among the Baptists in New England the doctrines of Calvin still prevailed, although some Arminianism had crept in among the Congregationalists.¹² Backus may have been correct on this latter point, at least to the limit of his own personal knowledge of Smith and others. However, it was not long after 1800 that this was not the case among all Baptists in New England.

We may cite two New England Baptists as the exceptions to Backus's statement on "prevailing Calvinism." Thomas Baldwin, a native of Connecticut, early moved to Canaan, New Hampshire, where he was converted in 1780. He became pastor of the Canaan church shortly thereafter and in 1790 was called to the pastorate of the Second Baptist church of Boston. He wrote much on the issues of his day, especially

⁹ W. R. Cross, *The Burned-over District: the social and intellectual history of enthusiastic religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (Ithaca, 1950), p. 159.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Isaac Backus, *History of New England*, ed. David Weston (2 vols.; Newton, Mass., 1871), II, 167-170.

¹² H. S. Burrage, *History of Baptists in New England* (Philadelphia, 1894) p. 281 quotes Backus on this point without giving his reference. See Backus, *op. cit.*, II, 104-105.

on immersion and close communion. In a sermon on Romans 8:28 he stated very clearly the Calvinistic principles of election. He said in part "God's purpose existed antecedent to our being called," and, "this calling is not owing to any contingent cause but is according to divine purpose."¹³ He stated dogmatically that "the sentiment I advocate makes God's choice the cause of our believing."¹⁴ He concluded that man's calling "rests wholly upon his immutable purpose."¹⁵ A thanksgiving sermon in 1795 supported this view on election when it said that man's conversion was "consequent upon His (God's) choice and could not be the cause of it."¹⁶

On the surface this is unadulterated Calvinism, but Baldwin takes cognizance of man's free will at the same time that he is preaching election. For instance, in this same sermon, he said that this election does not act as a motive on the will, so that he who rejects the Gospel offer, as well as he who accepts it, does so of his own free will, "unaware of any influence inconsistent with free agency."¹⁷

Further, in a sermon at the ordination of David Leonard in 1794, Baldwin argued that we don't love God because of a want of a right disposition *and* "because we don't choose to."¹⁸ Depravity is not such but what we have the capacity to love God, so that if we hate Him it is our own fault.¹⁹ In this same sermon he recognized the arguments bearing on a general and consistent atonement, and concluded that if Christ's death satisfied the whole law "it seems more consistent to consider it general."²⁰ Baldwin then went on to say that in this light it is consistent to "spread far and wide

¹³ *The Eternal Purpose of God, the foundation of effectual calling* (Boston, 1804), pp. 5-7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁶ *A sermon, delivered February 19, 1795: being the day of public thanksgiving throughout the United States* (Boston, 1795), p. 9.

¹⁷ *The Eternal Purpose of God*, p. 6.

¹⁸ *A sermon delivered at Bridgewater, December 17, 1794, at the ordination of the Reverend David Leonard to the work of an evangelist* (Boston, 1795), p. 18.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

the name of the Saviour and invite the ends of the earth to look unto Him and be saved." The Gospel preacher, he concluded, "will urge it as the command of God that all men everywhere repent."²¹

It would seem, then, that Baldwin was of a divided mind on the subject of election and free will; thinking abstractedly on Biblical themes, he was clear-cut in his convictions of election and divine decrees. In speaking to a candidate for ordination and offering his concepts of what the work of the Gospel minister should be and in reminiscing on his own conversion, he came to the place where practically the Gospel is offered to all, and what would be the purpose of offering it to all unless there were a faint hope that all would be able to accept it?

The significance of Baldwin's position lies in the fact that he himself was the product of a revival held by the Calvinistic Baptists in Canaan; in recounting his conversion from the viewpoint of election, he said: "It seemed to me that every one now could believe and I marvelled that I had not believed before."²² The verses used by the Calvinistic Baptist revivalist that memorable night of Baldwin's rebirth were: "Ho, every one that thirsteth," and "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." Later, as a pastor, he conducted successful revival meetings in both Canaan and Boston, and his way of explaining salvation to sinners was simply "believe and be saved."²³

The Calvinistic Baldwin seems to be a good illustration of what effect revivalism had on theological opinion and practice. He held the real meaning of election and limited atonement in abeyance until it could actually be determined who the elect were and then he could proceed to tell them of their "election."

This same development is seen even more clearly in the life of Samuel Shepard. A physician practising in Stratham,

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²² Daniel Chessman, *Memoir of Reverend Thomas Baldwin, D.D.* (Boston, 1826), p. 13.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

New Hampshire, he was converted under the ministry of Hezekiah Smith, and later he was ordained to the ministry by Smith, Manning, and Stillman, three of the outstanding Calvinistic Baptists of the day. He was a correspondent with Backus, the other leading New England Baptist, who was, of course, a staunch Calvinist. Shepard soon set out to conduct revival meetings in his neighbourhood and became a very successful revivalist as well as the pastor of the Stratham church. In the years from 1771 to his death in 1815 he established many churches in southern New Hampshire by the technique of conducting a revival and remaining for a few weeks afterwards to organize the converts into a church.

Fortunately Shepard has left us a literary deposit of his theological views. In particular his treatise on universal salvation is relevant for our purposes. He said in this work that as a result of all the confusion which stemmed from the doctrine of election, with no two people interpreting it alike, he wanted to help alleviate the beclouded issue by distinguishing two aspects of God's will, "the decreative" and "the perceptive." The former is intentional, eternal, unalterable, but beyond our knowledge.²⁴ The latter is discernible in God's revelation by precise proclamations, commands, precepts, and promises addressed to man. This preceptive will contains all that man needs to know to obtain salvation.²⁵ The implication is that the revelation of the preceptive will is amply clear for a man to accept or reject on his own initiative, for Shepard continued that as it has pleased God to make men moral agents and thereby make them accountable for their conduct they could not be so accountable without the proper power of moral agency. He concluded that it is this preceptive will which exhorts all men to repent and which can be broken.²⁶

Shepard's views are of even greater moment than Baldwin's because he lived and worked in the same general area as

²⁴ *The Principles of Universal Salvation Examined and Tried* (Exeter, 1798), p. 29.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

Randall and at the same time. Further, he and Randall conducted revival services together in 1778 and 1779 which is indisputable evidence that in practice they must have been agreed. We know that it was not during revivals but afterwards at the time of the instruction of the converts that they parted company.²⁷ Here, then, is another example of a strict Calvinist who in the actual work of conducting services for the salvation of souls modified his theology enough so that it was acceptable to Randall who was even then a free willer, although his position was not articulated until 1779.

This view, that revivalism profoundly affected Calvinistic theology, is seen not only in the lives of two Baptist leaders of that period, but the whole Baptist movement in New England reflects the same general mutation. This is seen in the files of *The Watchman*, the Baptist paper which began publication in Boston in 1819. Almost every issue carries the intelligence of a revival. It published articles favouring the holding of revival services, although it did take cognizance of the fact that there were some unfavourable elements connected with revivals.²⁸ Significantly, at the same time that the paper was supporting revivalism, the deviation from the Calvinistic orthodoxy of the day is evident. For example, in the very first year of publication, a long letter was written by the editor to comfort the parents of recently deceased infants. He assured them that their children were in heaven and said that the purpose of their deaths was for the salvation of the parents. While adhering to the old doctrine that they will be "enabled to give your hearts to God" the editor continued that they have every encouragement to do so and that they will be received into the arms of everlasting love, if they "seek God."²⁹

Another indication of the direction that the theological wind was then blowing is seen in the fact that *The Watchman* reprinted many articles by the English General Baptist

²⁷ Above, p. 115, note 5.

²⁸ *The Watchman*, October 2, 1819.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, July 10, 1819.

Robert Hall at the same time that *The Morning Star* was doing the same!

Further, the pendulum had swung far enough so that in the 1840's it was necessary for the paper to denounce "man's act of faith" as being entirely devoid of merit, which could only mean that it had been considered meritorious by some Baptists. Also it was necessary to re-emphasize the depravity of man by saying that simply because man was willing to receive God's gifts did not mean that he deserved them.³⁰ The climax was reached when an account of revivals contained the following: "To a soul who asks 'What must I do to be saved?' the only answer is 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.'"³¹ In the same column it was asserted that pardon is offered "on the simple condition of his [the sinner's] cordially accepting it."³²

Another supporting evidence for the departure of New England Baptists from their traditional Calvinism is the New Hampshire Confession of Faith. It was adopted by most New England Baptists at least in the 1830's and its Calvinism has, of course, been denied altogether, and "the dear old Philadelphia Confession" was preferred by the orthodox.³³

The Baptists were not alone in revivalism, nor, significantly enough, in the movement toward voluntarism. At least, partly as a result of revivals which permeated New England Congregationalism down to the Civil War and after, *The Congregationalist* editorialized early in 1858 that nobody but Hard Shell Baptists held to all the Calvinistic doctrines any longer.³⁴ This statement is borne out by sermons published in the *New York Pulpit* which were preached during the revival of 1858 in that city. All of these sermons have the

³⁰ *The Watchman*, April 1, 1842.

³¹ *Ibid.*, March 4, 1842.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ W. J. McClothlin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Philadelphia, 1911), p. 299; William Cathcart, *The Baptist Encyclopedia* (Philadelphia, 1881), p. 268.

³⁴ Quoted by *The Christian Register*, March 13, 1858.

simple invitation "Come to Jesus," with no further doctrinal implications at the meetings.³⁵

This proposition that the doctrine of man's freedom in salvation is intimately related to revivalism is seen again in the rise of the English General Baptists, New Connection, and in the abandoning of Calvinism by the English Particular Baptists. The former came into existence as a result of the Wesleyan revival in England.³⁶ The latter group, under the leadership of Robert Hall and Andrew Fuller, came to a practical free will position when in 1770 they pronounced that "every soul that comes to Christ to be saved from hell and sin by Him is to be encouraged."³⁷ Hall's statement, "the way to Jesus is graciously laid open for everyone who chooses to come to Him," was read by Carey with "raptures" and was influential in the foreign mission enterprise of the Particular Baptists.³⁸

This account of the rise of voluntarism with the Randallites and amongst other Baptists in England and America, as well as amongst Congregationalists, is not meant to exclude other factors, such as the philosophical attacks that were being made on the Calvinistic concept of man's freedom during the first half of the nineteenth century. Thomas C. Upham and Henry Tappan were two of the philosophical leaders in the movement to free American philosophy and theology from the "thraldom of the elder Jonathan Edwards." But it is remarkable that both of these men were Congregational clergymen, graduates of Andover and Auburn seminaries respectively, and Upham, at least, was greatly interested in the revivals that were taking place in and about Brunswick, Maine, while he was teaching at Bowdoin College.

³⁵ See also J. W. Alexander, *The Revival and its Lessons* (New York, 1858), *passim*. Albert Barnes, 1798-1870, the Presbyterian revivalist, E. N. Kirk, 1802-1874, and Francis Wayland, 1796-1865, are other examples of Calvinists who, in the midst of revivals, were free will in practice.

³⁶ A. C. Undersood, *A History of British Baptists* (London, 1947), p. 153.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Undoubtedly there were other concomitant factors and influences in the movement away from Calvinism, such as the Jacksonian democracy, but at the outset, and with Randall in particular, this thesis of the influence of revivalism would seem valid.

EXPLICATION OF FREEWILL BAPTIST THEOLOGY

In the following discussion of Freewill Baptist doctrine it should be kept in mind the rural areas where the denomination's strength lay and whence their leadership had come. The early exponents of their theology were frontiersmen without formal theological schooling. Their doctrinal views were hammered out upon the anvil of frontier life and expressed with a simplicity and forthrightness. Consequently we are not to be disturbed by the absence of the profound thought or the subtle distinction which we might rightfully expect from their contemporaries in other churches who had had more educational advantages.

Free Will. The Freewill Baptists, as their name implies, were concerned primarily with the doctrine of the will. For this reason this doctrine never lacked for expositions in all periods of denominational history. Its expositors were all agreed in their views of this distinguishing tenet.

Briefly stated, the denominational position on this pivotal doctrine was that man has a "will which is not necessitated by any order or decree of heaven."³⁹ By 1829 this doctrine that man is free to receive or reject God's offer of pardon had been sufficiently disseminated to cause attacks on it and to elicit a response by Freewill Baptist leaders. One such inquiry was addressed to the editor of *The Morning Star* and appeared in the issue of July 1, 1829. The correspondent wrote that he did not believe in either the Hopkinsian doctrine that God causes man's evil volitions or in the Freewill Baptist teaching that God is not responsible for man's saving faith. This letter

³⁹ Eli Noyes, *Freedom of the Human Will* (Dover, 1853), p. 3.

gave the editor, John Buzzell, an opening to expand the Freewill Baptist views of the matter. In essence, his reply was that God does not produce human volitions, either good or bad. To say this, he argued, would be to destroy man's agency and therefore his accountability. Buzzell conceded that although God is responsible for all the events of the natural world, this is a different matter because the world is passive, while man is not.⁴⁰

The natural sequence of thought raised the next query addressed to Freewill Baptist theologians. If it is so that God does not cause man's response to God's proffered grace, but rather it is of human origin, does not this detract from God's glory and honour?⁴¹ The reply in the *Freewill Baptist Magazine*, presumably by the editor Zalmon Tobey, was that this is not true for even a moment, since it is God who enables us to believe. "God graciously gives the ability, therefore we ought to use that ability."⁴² While "God is the meritorious cause of all that is good in his people" yet He so deals with them as to "leave free the human will."⁴³ This last assertion that God leaves free the human will, and its natural complement that God deals with his people as with "rational, free and accountable agents" was repeated several times in almost the same language in *The Morning Star* where it was explicated as follows.

Both "the power to will and the power to act" come from God who of course is the author of the whole man, body and soul. However, Samuel Burbank, co-editor of *The Morning Star*, pleaded for a distinction between the power to act, of which a sovereign God of necessity was the author, and the action itself, for which man alone was responsible. While God gives the power to will, man uses that power and performs the act of willing; without that power, given by God, man could not will at all. Yet while God gives the power to will, He "neither wills for man, nor works in man's stead; but He

⁴⁰ *Morning Star*, July 10, 1829.

⁴¹ *Freewill Baptist Magazine*, II (1829), 41.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

gives him power to do both and consequently man is accountable to God for these powers.⁴⁴ Eli Noyes stated this same aspect of the doctrine in this fashion: "True it is the Spirit of God which enlightens the mind, influences and strengthens the will but the will itself is called upon for compliance with Divine requisitions and is accused by our Saviour himself as the rejector of the benefits of His grace."⁴⁵

In illustrating this very point of man's right and ability to reject or accept the work of Christ, Hosea Quinby used the following hypothetical case. There were two beggars, destitute of all earthly goods and advantages. A wealthy merchant decided that he would show mercy upon these poor creatures and so he invited them to his residence and offered them food and lodging and then made them a proposition that for a small amount of work each day they could continue to remain in his household as his servants. One beggar refused the merchant's kindness, the other accepted. Now, asked Quinby, who was responsible for their actions? Certainly not the merchant for all he had done was make it possible for them to accept his kindness; the beggars were undoubtedly to be held accountable for their decision. Just so, said Quinby, with God and man in reference to eternal life. God made it possible and offered the gift to man: man, then, spurned it or otherwise, as he himself decided.⁴⁶

This view, that man's will is "self-determining," implicated the Freewill Baptists in theological discussions of depravity and the fall of Adam. Their opponents queried, if man's will is free to follow its own interests or those of God, does it not follow that man's will is not totally depraved, and further, that at least part of salvation is due to man's choice and is not wholly of God's grace? These charges were brought forward and answered by the ardent and indefatigable *Morning Star* editors. Burbank stated very dogmatically:

⁴⁴ *Morning Star*, July 1, 1831.

⁴⁵ Noyes, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁴⁶ Hosea Quinby, *Letter to the Reverend J. Butler, containing a Review of His Friendly Letters to a Lady, together with a general outline of the doctrines of Freewill Baptists*. (Limerick, Maine, 1832), p. 79.

There are no people on earth who more substantially believe that the conversion of the sinner is the work of God alone than do the Free Will Baptists. . . . They believe . . . that it is not by works of righteousness which they have done, . . . that all men have sinned and come short of the glory of God . . . that God alone is the moving, Christ the only procuring, and the Holy Spirit the efficient cause of the sinner's salvation.⁴⁷

The reasoning behind this outburst is fairly simple. Man is in "gross darkness and moral blindness," and totally unable to learn the true character of God: thus total depravity. In this condition, "he cannot love and serve God, cannot, unaided of God, enlighten his own mind, cannot change his own heart, and this we call inability."⁴⁸ This was the Freewill Baptist counterpart of the Calvinistic doctrine of total depravity.

Quinby stated this position even more emphatically:

Such is the insensibility occasioned by sin, that [man], destitute of the Spirit of God, cannot think a good thought, nor perform a holy act . . . he has no ability to choose what is strictly proper. He, of himself, has no ability to perform the requirements of God.⁴⁹

The Freewill Baptists were thus very clear in their conviction that man is unable to save himself, that he is "undone," "dead in trespasses and sin," and this logically put all the glory for salvation upon God. Though man was sinful, God loved him and sent Christ who furnished man with the means of repentance; He "gives the ability," "enlightens the mind," shows man his "true situation" so that "through the gracious aid given him in Jesus Christ he can truly repent, believe,

⁴⁷ *Morning Star*, August 31, 1831.

⁴⁸ *Freewill Baptist Magazine*, III (1830), 287.

⁴⁹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 36-38. John J. Butler, the Freewill Baptist theologian, had originally been a Calvinistic Baptist. One of his flock had been converted by the Freewill Baptists and he wrote his *Friendly Letters to a Lady* (Portland, 1830) to convince her of the error of her new-found friends. Quinby answered Butler with his work *Letters to the Reverend J. Butler*. It was Quinby's rebuttal that converted Butler to the Freewill Baptist position.

On this point see also John J. Butler, *Natural and Revealed Theology* (Dover, 1861), p. 200.

love and obey; or in other words, he can exercise holy volitions."⁵⁰

On this point of man's part in his salvation, though helpless in himself, Butler is pertinent.

He can do his duty . . . he can obey God . . . he can yield to be saved by divine grace. As Adam did not cease to be a moral being responsible to God, so man is still able to do, through the work of Christ and the proffered aid of the Holy Spirit, what God requires, namely, to avail himself of God's grace.⁵¹

This then brings us back to where we began, that although salvation is all of God, He will never "repent, believe or obey for us."⁵² Nor will He destroy free agency by an irresistible operation of His power: "He aids only when asked."⁵³

The Freewill Baptists turned this last mentioned view into evangelistic channels, as Enoch Mack warned:

Let no soul deceive himself with the vain notion that he shall be brought into the ark of grace without exercising his own free will . . . that he shall be turned by a resistless influence from the broad way . . . into the straight path of light.⁵⁴

Fall of Adam. From this exposition of Freewill Baptist views it is clear that they did not hold God responsible for man's damnation or salvation, except as He prescribed the conditions whereby man could damn or "elect" himself. This position is fraught with importance for the doctrines of original sin and Adam's fall. The Freewill Baptists, holding as they did to the free moral agency of man, consistently maintained that man would be punished for his own sins only, and not for those of Adam or any other mortal. In this way the Freewill Baptists totally rejected the Calvinistic doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin to the human race,

⁵⁰ *Morning Star*, July 10, 1829.

⁵¹ *Theology*, p. 187.

⁵² *Morning Star*, July 10, 1829.

⁵³ Enoch Mack, "Freedom of the Will," *Freewill Baptist Quarterly Magazine*, I, (1839), 74.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, I (1839), 74.

whereby Adam's sin became the sin of every man, and man was damned for what another had done.⁵⁵

At the same time that they denied this imputation, they stoutly affirmed that God could justly punish Adam's posterity in the sense and to the degree that the posterity itself had sinned. What they deleted was the idea of the transference of Adam's guilt to the whole human race until such time as the individual involved had had a chance to make that guilt his own by his personal violations of divine law.⁵⁶ As we have seen, the Freewill Baptists affirmed that every mortal would violate the divine precepts and expose himself to divine wrath. While rejecting the doctrine of imputation, they endorsed the idea of original sin.

It is singular that the Freewill Baptists in this way retained the results of Adam's sin (all men are sinners) while concomitantly rejecting the corporate concept of Adam's fall (imputation). They did not seem to realize that to have an end, you must also have a means to it. Also, they apparently never asked how all men become "totally unable," once a corporate relation to Adam had been denied.

Atonement and Election. The Freewill Baptists were extending their principles in a logical fashion when they preposterously denied the doctrines of election and limited atonement. If any man is able to believe in Christ, as their doctrine of free will affirmed, then what he is to believe must also be free.

At the first General Conference the question on the extent of the atonement was raised and given an answer incongruous with their previous denial of Adam's effect on the human race. It was worded thus: "Christ's atonement has removed all the condemnation brought about by Adam's folly" so that "all who transgress . . . and repent and believe . . . are thereby justified from all their sins."⁵⁷ Butler cited several Biblical passages to defend this position: he adduced Romans

⁵⁵ *Freewill Baptist Magazine*, I, (1828), 202.

⁵⁶ Butler, *Theology*, pp. 206-208.

⁵⁷ *Minutes of General Conference*, I, 33.

3 and 5, II Corinthians 5, and Hebrews 2.⁵⁸ Another query on the universality of the atonement was whether God, who has given temporal and physical blessings to all, would confine the infinitely great spiritual blessings to only a few? Would not this make God to appear less lovely in spiritual than in temporal affairs?⁵⁹

From these premises, that Christ died for all, it became very facile to say that if a man wills to believe, he casts the deciding ballot for his election and there is no eternal decree of fore-ordination relative to his salvation. Election is only according to God's foreknowledge, or to put it another way, there is a "general election" of all men because all are sincerely called and chosen. This view takes account of the election mentioned in Scripture by making it mean that all who come are the "elect."⁶⁰ In this way the repudiation of the "five points" of Calvinism was almost completed, with the last point, perseverance of the saints, remaining to be scrutinized.

In Freewill Baptist thought, the acceptance of Jesus Christ by the sinner by no means destroyed man's moral agency, and, as he first voluntarily entered the door of the sheepfold, so he can likewise leave the same way. The Divine arm is pledged to his continued safety only as long as the sinner obeys its directions. Any other view than this would destroy the preparatory doctrines of free will and free grace. Butler summed up this view by saying that God is not pledged to grant future blessedness to the saints except upon the condition of "present and abiding faithfulness."⁶¹

John Buzzell defined the Freewill Baptist position on this matter of "falling from grace" as not being "unconditional perseverance" but instead he classes the Freewill Baptists with those "who hold to watching, praying, and living . . .

⁵⁸ Butler, *Theology*, p. 225.

⁵⁹ *Freewill Baptist Magazine*, I (1827), 197.

⁶⁰ See also Butler, *Theology*, pp. 153-155, 213-217, 300; *Freewill Baptist Magazine*, II (1829), 156; *Ibid.*, II (1829), 73-74; Quinby, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-120.

⁶¹ Butler, *Theology*, p. 313. See also *Morning Star*, December 9, 1831.

going on to perfection, in pressing toward the mark."⁶²

Means. These distinctive teachings of the Freewill Baptists led to conflicts with other denominations on the matter of means in regeneration. The cry was raised that they believed in salvation by works, and its ally, that they practiced means in the work of regeneration. The former of these has been discussed above; the Freewill Baptists emphatically did not believe that anyone was saved by his own works, but only through the grace of Jesus Christ. But the fact that they insisted on a man's doing his own believing opened them to the charge of using means in regeneration. This aspect demands a further explanation. The Calvinistic Baptists, as represented by Butler before his conversion to the Freewill Baptist cause, held that regeneration precedes repentance and is actually its cause, so that even a man's sorrow for his sin is actually a product of God's Spirit alone.⁶³ The Freewill Baptists, on the other hand, held that man could exercise holy volitions, and among these "volitions" was repentance which would lead to regeneration. The difference between these two groups of Baptists lay in the order of regeneration and repentance, for both were agreed that repentance is essential to regeneration and that regeneration is instantaneous.

Quinby and the Freewill Baptists disagreed with the Calvinistic Baptists that regeneration precedes repentance and is therefore a cause of it on that basis that God had commanded all men everywhere to repent; this, they said, is impossible if regeneration is the only way to produce repentance for it is equivalent of making God repent for all men, if indeed He is not the author of repentance. Even the Calvinistic Baptists would not go so far as to say that repentance was the work of God, but rather of man, after God had regenerated him.⁶⁴

⁶² *Morning Star*, December 9, 1831. See also Quinby, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

⁶³ Quinby, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

⁶⁴ Quinby, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

If then a sinner can repent of his sins before his conversion, he is using means in regeneration; he can "seek the Lord," he can pray, attend meetings, converse with Christians and thereby make himself available to divine grace. These means precede his actual regeneration which is the work of God alone, but to the Calvinistic Baptists God must first change the sinner's heart before these paths may be taken so that with them, regeneration knows no means, since in point of time regeneration is prior to what the Freewill Baptists called means.

Butler described regeneration as involving two agencies, that of God and that of man. In the act of regeneration, the sinner is not passive, for he must do his duty, he must "give up his own way," and "yield wholly to Christ." Only then can God renew his heart through the Holy Spirit. "The sinner turns, yields, submits to God, but regeneration itself is the work of the Holy Spirit."⁶⁵ When he continued that regeneration "is wrought in the hearts of those only who voluntarily submit to God," his Calvinistic opponents must have denounced him as an arch-heretic; this was nothing less than blasphemy against the irresistible grace of a sovereign God! To the Freewill Baptists, however, such a statement was only the logical outworking of their doctrine of man's free will; without it, man, to them, would cease to be a moral being.

Open Communion. The Freewill Baptists, as we have seen, claimed to take their doctrine from the Bible. Their understanding of the Scriptures led them to the practice of inviting all Christians to partake with them at the Lord's Table. This was in direct opposition to the common practice of the Calvinistic Baptists of the period and so is worthy of our attention.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Butler, *Theology*, p. 262.

⁶⁶ Thomas Baldwin, pastor of the Second Baptist Church in Boston from 1790 to 1825, carried on a pamphlet warfare with Samuel Worcester, a Congregationalist, on the subject of close communion. See his *The Baptism of Believers Only and the Particular Communion of the Baptist Churches Explained and Vindicated* (2nd ed.; Boston, 1806).

The Freewill Baptists did not invite participation in the sacrament indiscriminately. Their invitation was extended only to Christians, who were members of churches of evangelical denominations.⁶⁷ This is repeated again and again in Freewill Baptist literature on the subject.⁶⁸ However, when the evidences of regeneration were unmistakeable, a Christian, not a member of any church, might be permitted to partake.⁶⁹ In either case the term open was qualified to mean open to Christians only, who, by "virtue of their Christian character," secured their right of participation, but it did not exclude non-immersed believers. This practice of open communion laid the Freewill Baptists bare to the attack of the Calvinistic Baptists who adhered to close communion, that is, restricted to immersed believers, members of a Baptist church. To them baptism by immersion was essential for communion.

In answer to this position, the Freewill Baptists published a little volume entitled *The Free Communionist* in which they stated their reasons for lifting the baptism requirement for participation at the Table. Briefly their answer was that Scripture nowhere teaches that baptism is pre-requisite to communion.⁷⁰ Rather, the communion is the communion of saints, and every true believer is rightfully a communionist."⁷¹ The Lord's Supper transcended denominational barriers, which, though justifiable in some cases, were not to be utilized to bar any from the Table. The only barrier was to be "true faith" which makes one a disciple. Such a one can "discern the body of the Lord" and is thereby automatically accepted by Christ and should also be accepted by Christ's Church.

It is interesting to note that the New Light preacher, Henry

⁶⁷ By evangelical, the Freewill Baptists meant those denominations which taught the doctrines essential to salvation. Butler, *Theology*, p. 428. They refused to commune with the Unitarians on this very point of salvation. *Minutes of General Conference*, I, 81.

⁶⁸ Butler, *Theology*, p. 428. See also Porter Burbank, "Free Communion," *Freewill Baptist Quarterly Magazine*, I (1839), 45.

⁶⁹ Butler, *Theology*, p. 429.

⁷⁰ *The Free Communionist* (Dover, 1841), pp. 16-18.

⁷¹ Butler, *Theology*, p. 427.

Alline, also revolted against the close communion of the Calvinistic Baptists. He wrote:

The circumstantial differences about water baptism concerning infants or adults, sprinkling or immersion, ought to be no more bar in uniting, building, or communing together at the Lord's Table and all other gospel privileges than the differences or their voices or looks.⁷²

The Christian Connection, a contemporary frontier movement of the Freewill Baptists, also practiced open communion.⁷³

Trinity. The Freewill Baptists were in cordial co-operation with the above-named Christian Connection until about 1800.⁷⁴ Elias Smith, the founder of the Christians, often preached at Freewill Baptist meetings.⁷⁵ Some of the early Christian ministers had been ordained by the Freewill Baptists and the latter often opened their meeting houses to the Christians for their services.⁷⁶ The relationships between the two bodies were so agreeable that for a time some consideration was given to a union between them.⁷⁷ While this proposed union failed, a "friendly intercourse" remained.⁷⁸

However, as doctrinal standards of the Christians and Freewill Baptists ossified, divergences were discovered. The Unitarianism⁷⁹ of the Christians in western New York State

⁷² *Two Mites Cast into the Offering of God* (Dover, 1804), p. 187.

⁷³ Warren Hathaway, *Discourse on Abner Jones and the Christian Denomination* (Newburyport, 1861), p. 16.

⁷⁴ *Christian Palladium*, I (1833), 304; *Morning Star*, March 14, 1833.

⁷⁵ I. D. Stewart, *History of the Freewill Baptists* (Dover, 1862), pp. 269-270; *Life . . . of Elias Smith written by himself* (Boston, 1840), pp. 339, 186-187.

⁷⁶ Simon Clough, *An Account of the Christian Denomination in the United States* (Boston, 1827), p. 5.

⁷⁷ This early intercourse between the Christians and the Freewill Baptists is readily understood. Both movements were revolts against Calvinism and both took their position on the sole authority of the Scriptures as distinct from human creeds. Each emphasized the necessity of the new birth.

⁷⁸ Clough, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁷⁹ By 1827 the Christians were openly flaunting their Unitarian views of Christ. Clough, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

prompted the Holland Purchase Yearly Meeting of Freewill Baptists to ask the General Conference: "What do the Free-will Baptists believe to be the Scripture doctrine relative to the character and office of Christ?"⁸⁰ The answer was unequivocal:

Of any professing to go under the name of Freewill Baptists, or to be in fellowship with the Connection preach different doctrine which represents Christ to be a mere creature, inferior to the Father, . . . such preaching [is] in our opinion that which is contrary to the doctrine of Christ as taught in the Scripture and that with which we have no fellowship.⁸¹

It was this dispute with the Christians that resulted in the publication of a work on the trinity by M. W. Alford.⁸² In this work the Freewill Baptists took the contemporary orthodox position on the Trinity. The essence of Alford's reasoning was that Christ was divine because of His omniscience, omnipresence, immutability and omnipotence. He concluded that Christ is uncreated, eternal, and pre-existent.⁸³

The General Conference of 1831 was more explicit.

In the character of Jesus Christ we believe 'God was manifest in the flesh'—that Christ was properly called Immanuel—'God with us' . . . we believe too that in his Divine nature he is 'true God' and . . . the maker of all things and the upholder of all things.⁸⁴

The Conference continued:

We understand that the Scriptures teach us to render unto Christ equal honor, glory and worship that God has required us to give unto himself; . . . we do not believe that the language of revelation, in calling Jesus Christ Son of God thereby

⁸⁰ *Minutes of General Conference*, I, 62.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁸² *The Manual: The Scriptural Doctrine of the Trinity Investigated and Defended* (Dover, 1842).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁸⁴ *Minutes of General Conference*, I, 63.

represents him as a mere creature, or as a being inferior to the Father, and able to act by delegated power only.⁸⁵

Universalism. The Freewill Baptists were vulnerable on the point of the universal salvation, because of their belief in a universal atonement. Their opponents pressed them hard at this point. "If you believe that Christ died for all, why then will not all be saved?" Their chief antagonist in this regard was Joshua Randell who was later expelled by both the Methodists and Freewill Baptists. He argued that the Freewill Baptist doctrine implied that Christ's atonement was for all penalties and that He satisfied all claims of divine justice. Therefore, said Randell, all men are released from divine wrath.⁸⁶ The Freewill Baptists denied this and cited the words of Christ in Matthew 25 and Revelation 20 relative to eternal punishment and fire.

This aspect of their doctrinal position involved the Freewill Baptists in a public debate with the Universalists. The familiar passages bearing on hell were enunciated by one side and as promptly interpreted by the other, so that those who were Freewill Baptists at the outset were so at the end, and the Universalists likewise.⁸⁷

Other Doctrines. Other doctrinal positions of the Freewill Baptists merit a brief word. In keeping with their literal interpretation of Scripture, some Freewill Baptists practiced the washing of feet according to the example in John 13. At first this custom was considered an ordinance of the Gospel as much as baptism and the Lord's Supper. Some questioned its

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* Zalmon Tobey, the editor of the *Freewill Baptist Quarterly Magazine*, later joined the Christians. He said that he was expelled from the Freewill Baptists for objecting to such hymns as the following: "To our eternal God, The Father and the Son, And Spirit all divine, Three mysteries in one; Salvation and Power, And Praise be given, By all on earth, and all in Heaven." *Christian Palladium*, II (1833), 86.

⁸⁶ Joshua Randell, *Address to the General Conference of the Freewill Baptist Connection delivered at Greenville, Rhode Island, October 4, 1837* (Hallowell, Maine, 1838), pp. 3-7.

⁸⁷ *Report of the Discussion held in Newmarket, New Hampshire, between Rev. S. C. Bulkley, Universalist, and Elias Hutchins, Freewill Baptist, including a reply to a letter from Mr. Balfour* (Dover, 1842).

standing as an ordinance since Randall had not confirmed the necessity of its observance, and certain practical considerations, such as the contemporary practice of wearing shoes and boots which was not done in the time of Christ, also mitigated against its continuance. After about 1832 the matter was no longer discussed and the practice finally disappeared.⁸⁸

On the matter of baptism, the Freewill Baptists were Baptistic in their position on the mode, namely immersion. In regard to secret societies, the Freewill Baptists were divided. Their members in Vermont were opposed to the Masonic order, as was David Marks who laid the death of William Morgan in western New York at the door of the Masons. At the same time some Maine Freewill Baptists were Masons and opposed a resolution in General Conference to condemn the order.⁸⁹

Some Freewill Baptist churches adopted the covenant as the basis of organizing a church, while others did not. The matter was never officially discussed and was left entirely in the hands of the local congregation.

The Freewill Baptists began as a movement in revolt against the prevailing theological determinism of their day. As might be expected, they wrote most extensively on that aspect of their doctrine which distinguished them from their contemporaries. However, as they grew in both numbers and area, they conflicted with other ecclesiastical systems, and consequently a body of literature came into being which gives us a full orbed picture of the theology of the entire denomination. By 1850 their theological delineation was complete and they were free to give their energies to other matters. It is this phase of their history that will concern us in the next chapter.

⁸⁸ *The Morning Star*, from November 24, 1830, to March 23, 1831, carried a series of articles on feet washing written by Samuel Burbank, who opposed the practice, and David Marks, who favoured it.

⁸⁹ *Morning Star*, December 8, 1828. See D. M. Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont, 1791-1850* (New York, 1939), chapter IV, "Anti-masonry," pp. 86-134.

CHAPTER V

DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOLS 1844-1878¹

THE MAJOR benevolent undertakings of the Freewill Baptists had been instituted by 1844, including the founding of their several academies. However, by that year, some Freewill Baptists were of the opinion that a collegiate institution was necessary and, as a result, Hillsdale College was founded in Michigan. It is indicative of the virility of the opponents of higher education among the Freewill Baptists that Hillsdale was not begun under denominational sponsorship, but by a group of interested Freewill Baptists.² The same situation obtained in the founding of Bates College in Maine. Bates had its inception in the mind of Oren B. Cheney who had the unofficial backing of individual Freewill Baptists but not of the denomination. It was in deference to this opposition that Cheney originally called the school he founded simply "a school of a high order, between a college and an Academy."³

¹ These years demarcate a natural period because 1844 saw the beginning of a collegiate programme among the Freewill Baptists while 1878 marks the last year in which a co-operative denominational enterprise was launched. From this viewpoint 1878 indicates the summit of Freewill Baptist benevolent energy and at the same time it is approximately the time when membership among the whites began to decline, although the overall picture was still one of growth because of the large annual Negro accessions.

² The commonly accepted view of the beginning of Hillsdale College has been that it was founded by the Michigan Yearly Meeting in 1844. J. C. Patterson, "History of Hillsdale College," *Michigan Pioneer Collections*, VI (1884) 137-165, held this position, as did Coe Hayne, *Baptist Trail Makers of Michigan* (Philadelphia, 1936), pp. 91-92. The true facts of the matter were brought to light by Joseph W. Mauck, president of Hillsdale, who located the Minutes of the Michigan Yearly Meeting. They made no mention of the school prior to 1848. Hence Mauck called it a "myth" that Hillsdale was founded by the Michigan Yearly Meeting. The view of President Mauck has been followed in V. L. Moore, *First Hundred Years of Hillsdale College* (Hillsdale, Michigan, 1944).

³ A. W. Anthony, *Bates College and its Background* (Philadelphia, 1936), Hillsdale, pp. 86-88.

The other college founded by the Freewill Baptists in this period was Storer College in Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, which was a direct outgrowth of the freedmen's work.

BATES COLLEGE⁴

Maine State Seminary, later to become Bates College, came into being as a result of the fire that demolished Parsonsfield Academy in September 1854. In pondering the consequences of the ruin of the oldest of Freewill Baptist schools, Oren B. Cheney,⁵ then the pastor of the Freewill Baptist church in Augusta, Maine, became impressed with the need of more centrally located educational opportunities for Freewill Baptist young people in the State. In his mind there formed the conviction that God was calling him to establish an institution which would conform to such a purpose. Accordingly he resigned his pastorate and assumed the task.⁶

At the time that Parsonsfield Academy burned, Cheney was the Corresponding Secretary of the Freewill Baptist Education Society and thus it was incumbent upon him to take some action relative to the school destroyed by fire. Conveniently, the anniversaries of the Freewill Baptist benevolent societies were scheduled to meet the next month in Saco, Maine. Cheney took this opportunity to call together "the friends of higher learning," thirty in number, who met between the sessions of the benevolent organizations. These friends were sufficiently impressed with what Cheney preached to them in the church gallery to call a convention for November in Topsham, Maine. At this later meeting

⁴ We have selected Bates College for amplified treatment rather than the older school, Hillsdale, because its location in New England made it more representative of the Freewill Baptist movement. Also Cheney was related to both Bates and Storer, the other college under discussion in this chapter.

⁵ Cheney's second wife, Emeline Burlingame Cheney, wrote *The Story of the Life and Work of Oren B. Cheney, Founder and First President of Bates College* (Boston, 1907). This is the only full length biography of Cheney, although Anthony, *Bates College*, pp. 7-56, treated Cheney's life from the viewpoint of his qualifications as an educator.

⁶ E. B. Cheney, *op. cit.* pp. 86-88.

Cheney presented his plan for a "school of high order, between a college and an Academy."⁷

At the Topsham meeting there was some consideration given to the respective needs of Parsonsfield Academy, the New Hampton Literary Institution and the Biblical School which had just been removed to New Hampton that fall. Isaac Dalton Stewart, the editor of *The Morning Star*, led those who feared the competition that Cheney's new school would create with the existing establishments. This opposition was successfully countered by a pledge of the Topsham convention to raise \$2,000 for the rebuilding of Parsonsfield and a resolution that the establishment of a new school "would not interfere with the interests of other similar institutions within or without the State."⁸

Once this rough road had been traversed, the Topsham group unanimously approved the project and they appointed a group of fifteen as a board of trustees. They in turn designated three of their number to secure a charter.

This committee, consisting of Cheney, Ebenezer Knowlton and Francis Lyford,⁹ set to work immediately. At their meeting in December 1854 they presented their first report which was published in *The Morning Star* of December 13, 1854. This report asked for Freewill Baptists to flood the legislature at Augusta with petitions for a charter and endowment for what was to be called Maine State Seminary.¹⁰ All told forty-

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁸ Anthony, *Bates College*, p. 89.

⁹ We know very little of Lyford, but Knowlton was an ordained Freewill Baptist minister turned politician. He had served as a state and national representative and became the president of Maine State Seminary for a period. He later refused to be a candidate for the governorship of Maine. Anthony, *Bates College*, p. 92.

¹⁰ Colleges and academies located in Maine had received both money and land grants from the Massachusetts General Court prior to 1820. The Constitution adopted by Maine in 1820 instructed the legislature "to encourage and suitably . . . endow, from time to time . . . all academies, colleges and seminaries of learning within the state." Article eight, quoted by R. J. Gabel, *Public Funds for Church and Private Schools* (Washington, 1937), p. 336. As a result of this directive, Maine endowed forty-four academies between 1820 and 1851. *Ibid.*, p. 190. Grants were made regardless of the denominational affiliation of the recipient, so that many of the present schools in Maine benefited from these endowments received in their early days.

nine petitions came in to the January session of the legislature and, after a brief delay, the committee on education, with Cheney's prodding, reported out a bill to grant the charter and a \$15,000 endowment. There was immediate and widespread opposition by Freewill Baptists on several counts. One was that the name was too broad and that it should be called Freewill Baptist Maine State Seminary. Cheney answered that the Methodists had a school named Maine Female Seminary, so why not just Maine State Seminary as "appropriate, unassuming and unsectarian?" Some Freewill Baptists wanted to petition the legislature directly for aid to other denominational institutions but Cheney persuaded them that to do so would wreck the chances of success of any one school. By the end of the session, Cheney asked the chairman of the committee on education to call up the bill. The latter did so grudgingly under the threat that if he didn't, some one else would.¹¹ The bill was called up and passed the House, was referred to the Senate where it also passed, and Cheney himself took it to the Governor who signed it two hours before the session was legally closed. Subsequently Cheney went home and to sleep, as he said, "with the happiest heart I had had in years."¹² In this fashion the Maine State Seminary was born and the infant was to become Bates College.

Three days later, on April 5, 1855, the fifteen trustees met at the Freewill Baptist Church in Augusta to accept the charter and adopt by-laws. By so doing, the corporation became a legal entity. At this same meeting an adjournment was taken until June 26 for the purpose of visiting proposed sites of the new institution. The next meeting was held in Vienna, Maine, on the adjourned date and lengthy arguments were heard in favour of each of the respective localities, Pittsfield, Unity, and Lewiston. Leading the discussion was Alonzo

¹¹ This particular session of the legislature contained from fifteen to twenty Freewill Baptists. *Morning Star*, September 27, 1854, and the *Lewiston Journal*, March 10, 1855. Be it remembered that Cheney himself had at one time served as a member of the legislature. Anthony, *Bates College*, p. 45.

¹² E. B. Cheney, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

Garcelon,¹³ a prominent citizen of Lewiston, who spoke to the effect that his city had the greatest water power, was destined to be a rail and industrial centre and that the people of Lewiston would donate twenty acres of land and \$10,000 in cash if it were chosen.

The land and money features seem to have been the deciding factors in the choice of Lewiston, although Garcelon's personal prestige was important. After twenty-three ballots, the vote was made unanimous in favour of Lewiston, Cheney himself being now "all for Lewiston" although originally he had favoured Pittsfield.¹⁴ When the Governor and his council approved the Lewiston site by formal vote on August 18, 1855, the decision was made final.¹⁵

With the site chosen, Cheney's real work was yet ahead of him. Funds for buildings had to be raised; the Lewiston pledge of \$10,000 had to be redeemed, and, more important, general Freewill Baptist interest had to be kindled. Cheney's indomitable spirit was contagious. He enlisted the *Lewiston Journal* in his espoused cause; Garcelon served as chairman of the building committee, and early in 1856 the gift of Mr. and Mrs. Seth Hathorn of Woolwich, Maine, provided the funds to erect Hathorn Hall and the cornerstone was laid in June. By September 1857, Parker Hall, a dormitory, was completed and school officially opened that fall with 115 pupils although by the end of the term, this number had swelled to 137.

The depression of 1857 left the seminary somewhat embarrassed but by no means destitute.¹⁶ Cheney could write in his own hand in 1859 that the seminary was virtually free from debt; what he meant was that by that time the assets of the

¹³ Garcelon was later mayor of Lewiston, governor of the state, and, though not a Freewill Baptist, a trustee of the seminary and later the college.

¹⁴ Anthony, *Bates College*, p. 112. See also an article in *The Morning Star*, July 11, 1855, by Cheney on this subject.

¹⁵ Anthony, *Bates College*, p. 137.

¹⁶ E. B. Cheney, *op. cit.*, pp. 115-117.

school, if collected and reduced to cash, would undoubtedly have exceeded the liabilities.¹⁷

The seminary continued its growth for the years preceding the Civil War, with 353 students registering in 1858 but by 1862 this was sharply reduced to eighty due to the Civil War.¹⁸ More significant than the numerical registration is that by 1861, the time when the first graduates of the seminary were ready for college, they petitioned Principal Cheney that they be permitted to remain at Lewiston and pursue college studies, contingent upon their meeting the cost.¹⁹ The second Mrs. Cheney said that these pleas stirred her husband deeply and he longed to help them but was unable to see his way clear to do so at that time.²⁰ The appeal to arrange a collegiate freshman class could scarcely have come at a less auspicious time, corresponding as it did with the opening of the Civil War. Cheney himself had spent the summer of 1861 in Washington, D.C., serving as a member of the Christian Commission.

By fall, Cheney was back in Lewiston, teaching his courses, but he was already at work to meet the students' (and his own) desires for the introduction of the college course. When the State legislature met in January 1862, Cheney had a new bill to present to them, entitled "A Collegiate Charter"; this was passed and approved in February. Its first section provided that the trustees of the Maine State Seminary "are hereby authorized and empowered to establish a collegiate department in connection with said Seminary," and "the Maine State Seminary shall have power to confer the usual degrees conferred by colleges."²¹ When this charter was accepted by the trustees on July 23, 1862, the Maine State Seminary

¹⁷ Anthony, *Bates College*, pp. 151-152.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁹ Cheney served as the principal of the seminary from 1858 until 1864 although for periods within that time he held other offices. In 1864 he became president of the college.

²⁰ E. B. Cheney, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

²¹ Anthony, *Bates College*, pp. 169-170.

stepped up on to a higher level of rights and privileges and had indeed become a new legal creature.²²

In a real sense this educational programme at Lewiston marks the completion of the sect-to-denomination cycle for the Freewill Baptists. The movement had its inception in the teachings of Elder Randall; later publications such as *The Morning Star* came into being to explicate these doctrines; then benevolent societies were organized to implement them; educational institutions were formed to prepare ministers to proclaim the same Gospel and Bates College was the climax of this educational development.²³ In this view denominational maturation in the typical American pattern had been completed.²⁴

FREEDMEN'S WORK AND STORER COLLEGE

The anti-slavery sentiment of the Freewill Baptists crystallized into organized activity on the Negro's behalf as soon as the occasion arose during the Civil War and immediately

²² The name was changed to Bates College in 1864 in recognition of the contributions of the Boston manufacturer, Benjamin Bates. *Ibid.*, pp. 209, 224, 227-234, 238. The Maine State Seminary ceased to exist as a legal part of the college after 1869 but its educational purpose was carried on by the Maine Central Institute, chartered in 1868 and located in Pittsfield, Maine. *Ibid.*, pp. 185-186, 210.

²³ It is notable that the founding of Bates was, in Cheney's mind, in the interest of the Freewill Baptist denomination. He founded Bates to provide a better educated ministry for the Freewill Baptists. See an address by J. A. Howe, Dean of Cobb Divinity School, in E. B. Cheney, *op. cit.*, p. 136. George T. Day, a Freewill Baptist from Rhode Island, recognized the import of Bates for the Freewill Baptists when he wrote to Cheney that the college was a "providential summons to a higher plane of denominational life." *Ibid.*, p. 324.

²⁴ The pattern of maturation may be reduced almost to a formula. One man of ability discovers a neglected truth, proclaims it passionately; then others pick up the threads where he leaves them, and, through papers and schools, propagate the founder's dogmas. Almost any denomination illustrates this phenomena, but the Christian and Missionary Alliance is a case in point. A. B. Simpson, disowned by the Presbyterians in New York City because of his interest in the immigrants, left the denomination to found an independent church where the new Americans would be welcome. From thence, he went on to preach missions, publish a paper and found a school. Unlike the Freewill Baptists, the Christian and Missionary Alliance has remained a separate denomination largely because its mission of reaching the unevangelized tribes has not been adopted by other Christian groups.

thereafter. As we noted, Cheney was in contact with the Christian Commission²⁵ as early as 1861. At that time, however, the problem of the freedmen had not yet arisen. *The Morning Star* of March 11, 1863, carried the first appeal to aid the freedmen, but it was a reprint from the *Home Evangelist*, a paper of the northern Baptists. After that, numerous articles appeared in the *Star*, asking for the relief of the freedmen.

The Quarterly and Yearly Meetings were the first ones to give heed to these appeals but their actions were usually confined to resolutions proposing that work be done "in behalf of the poor and despised for whom we have long lifted up the voice."²⁶ The first concrete act was the appointment of a missionary to the freedmen in June 1863, but because of illness the appointee, now unknown by name, was prevented and so it was not until August 26, 1863, when the appointment of the Reverend Ebenezer Knowlton of New Hampshire was announced that work was actually begun. At this time it was also announced that two others were ready to go if the money had been available.²⁷

At this juncture, when the war was still in process, the best avenue of approach to the Negro problem was through the military, or through a group in co-operation with it. Thus Knowlton went under the auspices of the New York Freedmen's Aid Association and, in January 1864, he received a commission from the government as the General Missionary Agent to the Freedmen.²⁸ In turn, Knowlton recommended that the Freewill Baptist work among the freedmen be conducted through these channels.²⁹

²⁵ The Christian Commission was formed in New York in 1861 to provide comforts and supplies to soldiers and sailors which were not furnished by the Federal Government. It received its support primarily from the churches. For an account of the Freewill Baptists and their relation to the Commission, see A. K. Moulton, "Christian Commission Work," *Freewill Baptist Quarterly*, XIII (1865), pp. 322-352.

²⁶ I. D. Stewart, "The Anti-Slavery Record of Freewill Baptists," *Freewill Baptist Quarterly*, XI (1868), 41-68.

²⁷ *Morning Star*, August 26, 1863.

²⁸ Stewart, "Anti-Slavery Record," p. 67.

²⁹ See his article in *The Morning Star*, August 5, 1863, "How We Can Best Aid the Freedman."

After only three months in the field, Knowlton returned, but by that time he had succeeded in establishing two churches, one at Beaufort, South Carolina, and the other at a near by plantation. These churches consisted of former slaves and the Freewill Baptists were quite proud of having an abolition church "at the very headquarters of the slaveholding aristocracy of the South—the Jerusalem of the patriarchal institution."³⁰

Knowlton originally had gone to Beaufort at the request of W. T. Richardson, a missionary of the American Missionary Association. When he returned he recommended that the Freewill Baptists continue to co-operate with the American Missionary Association inasmuch as the War Department had suggested that if they did so, there would be less trouble securing government assistance for school work through the Freedmen's Bureau.³¹ To that end Knowlton himself drew up some articles of agreement between the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society and the American Missionary Association and these were signed in April 1864.

While the Freewill Baptists sent missionaries into other sections of the South, their work centred at Beaufort for the present.³² Timothy Eaton became the pastor of the church after Knowlton's return to the North, and he proceeded to lead the congregation in the construction of a "praise

³⁰ *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society* (Dover, 1864), p. 25.

³¹ The Bureau, headed by General Oliver O. Howard, assisted freedmen's work by procuring school buildings and providing transportation and protection for teachers, but not teachers' salaries. Lyman Abbott, for one, seriously questioned the safety in the light of the American tradition of the separation of church and state, of appropriating money to schools "avowedly organized to teach denominational tenets." In view of this scruple, Abbott worked vigorously as the executive secretary of the American Freedmen's Union Commission, a non-sectarian group interested in promoting secular education among the Negroes. See Ira V. Brown, *Lyman Abbott, Christian Evolutionist* (Cambridge, 1953), p. 42.

³² From November 1863 until October 1864 the Freewill Baptists sent twenty-one missionaries into the South, usually in the Carolinas or Virginia. *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society* (Dover, 1864), p. 28.

house."³³ The necessary building materials were sent by boat from Portland, Maine, and various items of interior furnishings were purchased by interested groups in northern churches.³⁴

In spite of fairly auspicious beginnings at Beaufort, the Freewill Baptist cause there did not prosper. In November 1864 Silas Curtis, the corresponding secretary of the Home Mission Society, received an appointment from the Society's executive board to visit the work. He made a daily record of his trip in a journal.³⁵ From a perusal of this manuscript it seems that the troubles in Beaufort were manifold. The building of the church was hindered by a lack of funds and the unskilled labour of the Negroes; there was friction between Richardson and Eaton as well as between Eaton and the regular Baptist pastor; the army stationed on the island exploited the Negroes so that the latter became suspicious of all efforts of the whites to aid them. As a result of these obstacles the Freewill Baptist work at Beaufort finally collapsed and the property was liquidated.³⁶

Happily, at about this time, the Freewill Baptists were assigned "one of the most interesting and promising fields for missionary work," the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia.³⁷ Thirty thousand freedmen were concentrated in that area so that it demanded the utmost of Freewill Baptist mission resources. As a result, their missionaries were withdrawn from

³³ "Praise House" is a term that was introduced into the American scene about the time of freedmen's work. It denoted a building where Negroes met for worship and "shouted praises to God."

³⁴ Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

³⁵ This journal is in manuscript at the New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord.

³⁶ *Thirty-third Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society* (Dover, 1867), p. 92.

³⁷ *Thirty-second Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society* (Dover, 1866), p. 82. While this report does not specify from whom the Freewill Baptists received this territorial assignment, we assume from their previous cordial relations with the American Missionary Association that it was from that group. It is improbable that it came from the American Freedmen's Union Commission, the only other possibility, because the Union Commission was interested chiefly in secular education, and the Freewill Baptists viewed the freedmen's work as a timely opportunity to propagate their distinctive doctrinal tenets.

other areas in the South and assigned to the Valley. By 1867 it was said that "this last year all efforts among the freedmen have been confined to the Shenandoah Valley."³⁸

The first step in making this area "the New England of the country in influence" was the appointment of Nathan C. Brackett as its missionary. He arrived in Harper's Ferry in October 1865. Soon thereafter he received a government appointment as superintendent of freedmen's schools in Jefferson and Berkeley counties in West Virginia. As such he handled all federal appropriations of school funds which meant that he was in a position to implement considerably all phases of Freewill Baptist work. His missionary salary was paid by the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society.

The month after Brackett arrived in Virginia, Anne Dudley, a Maine State Seminary graduate, and three other Freewill Baptist young women proceeded to Harper's Ferry to teach under his supervision.³⁹ Their early living conditions were wretched, but they survived the ordeal, remained on the field, and reached an ever increasing number of students annually.⁴⁰ By 1867 Miss Dudley's original company had been augmented so that they reached 2,500 pupils that year with a total of sixteen teachers.⁴¹

By 1867 the work in the Shenandoah Valley had developed to the place that the establishment of a normal school was being considered. I. D. Stewart, reporting for the committee

³⁸ *Thirty-third Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Mission Society*, p. 81.

³⁹ Maine State Seminary was the pioneer institution in New England to open its doors to both women and men, although Mt. Holyoke Seminary had provided equal facilities in 1836. Anthony, *Bates College*, pp. 157, 270-277. For a delightful account of the Freewill Baptist attitude towards women and the role they played in Freewill Baptist history and in other denominations, see Elisabeth Anthony Dexter, *Career Women of America 1776-1840* (Francesstown, N.H., 1950), chapter three, entitled "Despise St. Paul," pp. 50-68.

⁴⁰ For a good discussion of the reception that northern teachers received as they began their work among the freedmen, see H. L. Swint, *The Northern Teachers in the South, 1862-1870* (Nashville, 1941), pp. 94-142.

⁴¹ This teaching staff is to be compared numerically with the 1,430 northern teachers at work in the South in 1866-1867. J. W. Alvord, *Semi-annual Reports on Schools and Finances for Freedmen* (10 vols.; Washington, 1866-1870), III, 41. Cited by Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

assigned to study such a step, said that there was no other way to meet the needs for teachers for the freedmen than to establish a school to train Negroes for the task. He continued that teachers from the North were inadequate in number and even if they were sufficient, they were not as effectual for the special work as Negro teachers.⁴² Brackett was assigned to investigate the matter still further, and as a result of his work Harper's Ferry was decided upon as the site of the new normal school, largely because on Camp Hill there were four large brick government buildings which the Freewill Baptists felt confident they could secure by negotiation from the government through the Freedman's Bureau.

It was at this moment that the educational leader of the Freewill Baptists, Oren B. Cheney, again entered the picture. Always indefatigable in his efforts to secure funds for Bates, early in 1867 he had gone to visit John Storer, an elderly gentleman of Sanford, Maine,⁴³ from whom he obtained \$1,000. However, Storer had additional resources, and in view of his age, he had been contemplating to whom he should leave his money. The very day that Cheney visited him he had decided to endow a school for the education of the freedmen and to that end he had started to open a correspondence with a denomination other than the Freewill Baptist. He told Cheney that he would like to give to the Freewill Baptists but was fearful that "they would not make a big enough thing of the school" and, further, that they would be too long in starting it, for Storer was interested in seeing the school in operation before his death. Cheney pleaded with him to give

⁴² *Thirty-third Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society*, p. 90.

⁴³ John Storer, apart from this relationship to Cheney and the naming of the normal school after him, is unknown to Freewill Baptist work. His death, which occurred on October 23, 1867, was publicized in the *Christian Freeman*, a Universalist paper of abolition and prohibition sentiments. See F. L. Mott, *A History of American Magazines* (Cambridge, 1938), II, 72, note 118. This fact gives us an idea of Storer's theological and ethical sympathies, if not of his actual church membership. A letter from L. B. Terrell, president of Storer, to the author on January 22, 1954, said that information about Storer is meagre and that he did not know of what denomination Storer was a member.

the Freewill Baptists an opportunity to act on the matter, with a definite time limit set for them to open the school. Storer agreed to this and thereupon Cheney drew a legal instrument which provided for the necessary details. The date to accept the proposal was to be July 1, 1867, and the school had to be in operation by September 1868.⁴⁴

The instrument which Cheney formulated that day provided for several matters, but prominent among them was that Storer was to place his gift in the amount of \$10,000 in the hands of a third party who was to be instructed to release it to the Freewill Baptists if they had raised an additional \$10,000 not later than January 1, 1868. A commission, of which Cheney was to be a member, was to be appointed to raise this additional amount. The document also provided that the school was to be "in the end" a college but it might be operated parenthetically as a college and seminary. Moreover, it was to be located in West Virginia, Virginia, or "one of the southern or middle States." The instrument also provided that the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society should appoint the trustees of the college, and also that it was to be open to both sexes.

Once this transaction of Cheney's with Storer was publicized, the movement for the establishment of the aforementioned normal school was itself given great impetus. The New Hampshire Yearly Meeting in 1867 appointed a "commission for the promotion of education in the south." They co-operated with the committee appointed by Storer, which committee included, besides Cheney, Ebenezer Knowlton, Silas Curtis, George Day, J. M. Brewster, N. C. Brackett, and George Goodwin, in successfully raising the stipulated \$10,000 by January 1, 1868. In fact a total of \$45,122 was raised in the years 1867-1868 for the freedmen's work, which sum included Storer's gift, an appropriation of \$6,500 from the Freedmen's Bureau, and \$13,000 for the normal school which

⁴⁴ Cheney published an account of his conversation and transaction with Storer that notable day in *The Morning Star*, February 27, 1867.

opened in September 1867, one year before the college.⁴⁵

The commission acted quickly in the matter of a charter, as well as in raising the money. By November 1867 they had met at Harper's Ferry and organized a board of trustees. This board, under the power given them by the original document issued by Storer, selected Harper's Ferry as the site of the new college and then petitioned the West Virginia legislature for a charter which was granted them that same month.⁴⁶ The next month President Johnson signed the bill which transferred the government buildings at Harper's Ferry to the trustees of the college.⁴⁷ The college was opened the next September, thus fulfilling the stipulation that Storer had made. Nathan C. Brackett had been chosen as the principal of the new normal and so was the logical choice as the first president of Storer College.

From this time on, Freewill Baptist work among the freedmen remained centred at Harper's Ferry, although for a time the outlying schools in the Valley were also staffed by their missionaries. By 1872 the Home Mission Society was able to report that "free schools," that is those supported by the State department of education, had replaced all the schools conducted by the Freewill Baptists except the normal school—Storer College institution.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ *Thirty-fourth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society* (Dover, 1868), p. 61.

⁴⁶ *The Morning Star* of August 26, 1868, reported that the bill for the charter was bitterly opposed by the West Virginia legislature but "saved yet so as by fire." This is highly credible considering the opposition that Southern whites had for work among the freedmen, and especially since the Storer College charter was the first liberal charter which provided for college education without distinction of the race or colour of the pupils.

⁴⁷ W. P. Fessenden, a member of the commission appointed by the New Hampshire Yearly Meeting, sponsored the bill to transfer the property, and James Garfield, later President, did likewise in the House of Representatives. Garfield was a graduate of Geauga Seminary at Chester, Ohio, a Freewill Baptist School. See above, p. 91.

⁴⁸ *Thirty-eighth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society* (Dover, 1872), p. 14. While this chapter has focused attention on the Freewill Baptist work among the freedmen in the South, it should not be overlooked that in 1864 a western committee of Freewill Baptists was organized to raise money for freedmen's work in the Mississippi Valley

The establishment of Storer College marked the culmination of Freewill Baptist efforts to aid the freedmen. Their contributions to this cause were, of course, but a fraction of the total programme conducted on behalf of the freedmen. Other denominations actually carried on more extensive work.⁴⁹ The American Missionary Association, for example, founded three schools, Fisk and Atlanta universities and the Hampton Institute. From February 1862 to July 1867 a total of \$5,500,000 was contributed for freedmen's aid through both non-sectarian and missionary societies.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, in proportion to their numerical strength, the Freewill Baptist efforts were outstanding in their achievements.

The other benevolent enterprises launched after the Civil War were the Temperance Union, begun in 1871, and the United Society of Free Baptist Young People which had its beginnings in Gobles, Michigan, in 1878. The interest of Freewill Baptist women in foreign missions stemmed from 1841 when a "Female Foreign Mission Society" was organized in Rhode Island. This group underwent various transformations, the last being in 1873 when it adopted the name Free Baptist Women's Missionary Society and undertook work among the harem women in India.⁵¹ Except for the youth work, these projects do not represent new areas of interest for Freewill Baptists and hence they are not being given extended treatment.

and by 1868 they were operating schools in Illinois and Missouri. The most permanent of these schools, the Manning Bible School in Cairo, Illinois, was merged with the Baptist school for Negroes at Nashville, Tennessee, about the time the Freewill Baptists and Baptists united.

⁴⁹ A. D. Mayo, "The Work of Certain Northern Churches in the Education of the Freedman, 1861-1900," *Report of the (United States) Commissioner of Education for the Year 1902* (2 vols.; Washington, 1903), I, 285-314.

⁵⁰ Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

⁵¹ For the history of the foreign mission work of the Freewill Baptist women see Mary A. Davis, *History of the Free Baptist Woman's Missionary Society* (Boston, 1900); M. M. Hutchins Hills, *Reminiscences: a brief history of the Free Baptist India Mission* (Dover, 1885).

CHAPTER VI

THE ROAD TO REUNION 1878-1911¹

THE ULTIMATE union of Baptists and Freewill Baptists in October 1911 was not an improvised marriage; it was a pre-meditated action, the origins of which dated back at least to 1859.² However, it took the next half-century to focus attention on all the factors which mitigated against a separate denominational existence and to let them have free play in order to bring about the joining of the two bodies. It is our purpose to depict these factors and then to trace the events that ensued.

CAUSES OF DECLINE

Theological. The Freewill Baptist denomination originated as a protest against the prevailing Calvinism of the late seventeen-hundreds, especially against the tenets of election and limited atonement. As such a protest, it was undoubtedly relevant at that time, but it was superfluous in the latter half of the nineteenth century because by then the Baptists had abandoned their rigid Calvinism. There are abundant evidences of this relinquishment. For example, in writing a Baptist catechism in 1877, William W. Everts, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Chicago, answered the question: "What is the doctrine of election?" in these words: "Election

¹ This periodization corresponds, in its beginning date, with that of the last chapter, the reasons for it being given there. The year 1911 marks the formal transfer of Freewill Baptist properties to the then Northern Baptist Convention and so is a convenient terminal date.

² In that year, so far as I have been able to ascertain, the subject of the union of Baptists and Freewill Baptists was first mentioned publicly and in print. See Dexter Waterman, *The Mission of the Freewill Baptists: Their Past, Present and Future* (Dover, 1859), p. 59.

is the gracious purpose of God according to which he regenerates, sanctifies, and saves sinners.”³

A little later, a writer in *The Baptist Quarterly Review* also excised the historic connotations from the doctrine of election.⁴ The essence of his reasoning was that the election passages of Scripture are to be explained by the fact that in the age before the Gospel, election was a necessary factor in carrying out God’s purposes. But since the new age has come “men are now and henceforth to be saved by personal faith in a personal Christ whom they may accept or reject.”⁵

Elgin, in elucidating this interpretation, said that “God’s exercise of his sovereign will” was withdrawn along with other supernatural means when God’s purpose was accomplished so that “faith now comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.”⁶ In closing, Elgin admonished: “It is just as great folly to teach that all who now can be saved were eternally chosen to be saved as it would be to teach that every one must be, like Paul, supernaturally called.”⁷

Although the *Review* felt it necessary to state on its cover that “each writer is solely responsible for the views expressed in his article,” it is significant that such an attack could be levelled against the doctrine of election in the only journal of northern Baptists of the period.

While it is indisputable that the doctrine of election was generally fading from the scene, or at least had been emptied of its historic meaning, in the latter half of the nineteenth century,⁸ the same cannot be said unqualifiedly of the matter of close communion, the other real point of difference between

³ *Compend of Christian Doctrines Held by Baptists: in catechism* (Chicago, 1877), p. 9.

⁴ G. H. Elgin, “The Biblical View of Election,” *The Baptist Quarterly Review*, XII (1890), pp. 23-35.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁸ An obvious admission of this is to be found in a pamphlet written by the distinguished Baptist theologian, A. H. Strong, which was an attempt by him to bridge the gulf between Calvinism and Arminianism. See A. H. Newman, *History of the Baptist Churches* (6th ed., New York, 1915), p. 515.

the Baptists and Freewill Baptists. This practice continued on into the twentieth century, and proved to be the most troublesome element in reunion negotiations, but there are some indications that it too was gradually being extirpated in the late nineteen-hundreds. George Dana Boardman, pastor of the influential First Baptist Church of Philadelphia, wrote in 1887 that "the formal qualification for the Lord's Supper is Christian Baptism" but in the next statement he admitted that there was no proof that the disciples were baptized before the Supper was instituted, or that even if they were baptized, the proof was lacking that it was Christian baptism.⁹ From this premise, Boardman went on to plead:

Why then, wound the conscience of any of our Father's misguided yet still dear children by claiming the authority of a divine dixit for baptism as a prerequisite to communion when after all, the authority is only an assumption, or at best, a human inference, and which, because human, may possibly be erroneous.¹⁰

Boardman then admitted that while baptism is only a formal condition of participation, Christian character is the moral prerequisite which gives the communicant the moral right to the Supper. As if fearful of protests to this position, he concluded judiciously:

Let us not . . . surrender our position that baptism is a prerequisite to communion even though it is only a ritual prerequisite . . . But let us not ostentatiously press it, as though it were the chief term of communion. If we presume to invite at all, let us invite to the Lord's Table, not to ours; let us decline the past . . . and leave the responsibility where it belongs; . . . exercising the charity which thinketh no evil.¹¹

⁹ "The Lord's Supper," *Baptist Quarterly Review*, IX (1887), pp. 320-336. This reference is on pp. 331-332.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 335. See also J. E. Gregory, "Did Christ Give Judas the Lord's Supper and How Does the Answer Affect Baptist Practice?" *Baptist Quarterly Review*, XIV (1892), pp. 431-442. Gregory argued that since Judas was not at the table when the bread and cup were distributed it strengthened the Baptist position that only those who "most lovingly and loyally follow" the Lord are entitled to the Lord's Supper, but baptism is not mentioned as a prerequisite.

This movement of the Baptists towards the Freewill Baptist position on the two heretofore divisive matters of election and close communion left the Freewill Baptist Gospel no distinctiveness and therefore no unique appeal to the people.¹² What the Freewill Baptists had been preaching with effectiveness and with which they had gained a real hearing had now been appropriated and was being said with equal vigour by a larger denomination.¹³ The devastating effect of this adoption was that the Freewill Baptists had nothing left to feed upon and their alternative, union or extinction, was soon evident.

Geographical. As far as ecclesiastical matters are concerned, the loss of the Freewill Baptist ethos is the nub of the whole affair, but as is so often true, there were social factors that greatly affected the denominational status. In this particular period the nation-wide movement from the country to city had its bearing upon Freewill Baptist denominational vigour, especially since the Freewill Baptists were centred in northern New England where the migration was the most widespread.¹⁴

H. F. Wilson appropriately calls the years from 1870 to 1900 "the winter season" for northern New England.¹⁵ During these years, he states, the proportion of improved farm land steadily decreased, as did farm land values, and the number of people engaged in farming. By 1890 sufficient migration had occurred so that in that year fifty-one per cent of the New England population was living in towns of 2,500 population or over. Thus by that date New England's population

¹² H. S. Burrage, *History of the Baptists in Maine* (Portland, 1904), p. 60, said: "The position which Randall held at that time is in entire harmony with that which Maine Baptists hold at the present day."

¹³ As early as 1862 the Freewill Baptists were aware that their "Gospel" was being taken over by the Baptists. See "The Freewill Baptist Denomination—Its Position and Prospects," *Freewill Baptist Quarterly*, X, (1862), pp. 395-396.

¹⁴ Generally speaking it may be said that throughout Freewill Baptist history from forty to fifty per cent of all Freewill Baptists resided in Maine and New Hampshire. This is exclusive of the Negro Quarterly Meetings which joined the Freewill Baptists after the Civil War.

¹⁵ *The Hill Country of Northern New England: Its Social and Economic History, 1790-1930* (New York, 1936).

had become an urban one. Further, in the decade ending in 1890, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Massachusetts had all declined in rural population. In 1880 there were 163,325 natives of rural New England living in urban states. But what was most telling was that those who removed to the cities were chiefly young people so that it left the rural sections denuded of vigorous and enterprising workers.¹⁶

As we might expect, this exodus made a cataclysmic impact on the Freewill Baptists. At first sight this is not apparent from the annual statistics published in the *Register and Yearbook*. From 1870 with 66,961 communicants, they had increased to 87,553 in 1897 which was the largest number of members they ever reported.¹⁷ Upon further study, however, we discover that there was a significant transition occurring in their constituency. The communicant membership in the heretofore stronghold of northern New England was steadily declining. Taken by States here is the picture: New Hampshire had 9,202 Freewill Baptists in 1880 and 8,240 in 1900; Maine had 15,870 in 1880 and 13,703 in 1900; Vermont likewise declined from 3,050 members in 1880 to 1,825 in 1900.¹⁸

The accessions which accounted for the overall numerical increases came from southern Negro Quarterly Meetings. It will be recalled that the Freewill Baptists were early alert to the opportunities for freedmen's work in both the South and in the States bordering the Mississippi River. These labours produced numerous converts to their cause. These adherents organized themselves into Quarterly Meetings which soon joined the General Conference. Thus there were additions in

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 99-107. See also A. M. Schlesinger, *Rise of Modern America 1865-1951* (New York, 1951), pp. 27-45; Schlesinger, *Rise of the City* (History of American Life X; New York, 1933), pp. 57-71 for extensive bibliographical references on this population migration.

¹⁷ *The Freewill Baptist Register for the Year of our Lord 1870* (Dover, 1870), p. 70; *Free Baptist Register and Yearbook* (Boston, 1897), p. 113.

¹⁸ It is also noteworthy that the regular Baptists also declined in these areas in the same period. From 21,165 members in Maine in 1880 they skidded to 20,024 in 1900; from 9,876 in Vermont in 1880 they declined to 8,518 in 1900, while New Hampshire showed the slight rise from 9,127 in 1880 to 9,715 in 1900. *American Baptist Yearbook* (Philadelphia, 1880), p. 289; *ibid.*, 1900, p. 341.

this period as follows: 4,000 members were added from eastern North Carolina in 1885; 1,080 additions were reported from Virginia and West Virginia in 1890; 1,438 new members were added from the Missouri Quarterly Meeting in 1890; 1,745 additions were credited from Tennessee in 1900, and Louisiana showed a membership of 1,273 in 1895.¹⁹

It is a recognized fact that the economic and cultural conditions of the Negroes immediately after the rebellion were not such as to make them as valuable to any cause as they were later to become. While they were faithful and ardent pupils in Freewill Baptist schools, they were not able yet to discharge faithfully their church obligations as mature Christians. Hence we gain a distorted picture of Freewill Baptist strength if we assess it only from the viewpoint of numerical statistics at this time.

While these statistics are startling, what is even more notable is that as the Freewill Baptists were declining in the areas where the population was being depleted, they were failing to grow significantly in the States into which the population was moving. For example, from 5,977 members in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, a joint Yearly Meeting, in 1880, they had grown to only 7,976 in 1900 while the regular Baptists in Massachusetts alone had grown from 48,883 in 1880 to 70,907 in 1900.²⁰

Part of the failure to grow in the urban areas where scores of their own people were settling was due to the antecedent failure of Freewill Baptists to begin churches early enough in the strategic places. Consequently when Freewill Baptists would arrive in a city they usually did not find any Freewill Baptist church or, if they did, it was apt to be a struggling organization with an intolerable indebtedness.²¹ The secretary of the Home Mission Society lamented this when he said:

¹⁹ See the *Register and Yearbook* for the appropriate years under the heading "Recapitulation."

²⁰ *American Baptist Yearbook* (Philadelphia, 1880), p. 289; *ibid.*, 1900, p. 341.

²¹ In 1883 the Freewill Baptist church in Boston was still seeking an adequate building. *Fifty-second Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist*

Thousands of our young people have gone in the past from their country homes and churches to be lost to us as a people for the reason that when they went to the city they could not find the people of their choice and have sought homes in other folds.²²

He then rejoiced that measures were being taken to correct that situation but by 1886 it was too late to recapture people already lost "to other folds" or to overtake in capacity and programme the churches already on the field.²³ Herein lies one of the two greatest causes of Freewill Baptist decline, the other being the theological metamorphosis of the regular Baptists as seen above.

A late start in developing churches in urban areas would not, in itself, have precluded at least modified success but there was a concomitant factor. This was the precipitous decline in contributions for home mission work, other than those for the freedman's cause. In 1876 there was a *per capita* gift of forty cents to the national society; by 1888 this had declined to six cents; by 1890 it was down to four cents and by 1899 it was a mere three cents. In that year, 1899, the secretary of the society said that he had no significant activities of the national society to report and therefore merely summarized the accomplishments of the various yearly meetings.²⁴

Home Mission Society (Boston, 1886), p. 14; the Freewill Baptist church in Worcester did not lay its corner-stone until 1891. *Fifty-seventh Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society* (Boston, 1891), p. 133; the Pond Street church in Providence was in danger of extinction for financial reasons as late as 1887. *Fifty-third Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society* (Boston, 1887), p. 17.

²² *Fifty-second Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society* (Boston, 1886), p. 15.

²³ *Fifty-eighth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society* (Boston, 1892), p. 134. For a study of what other denominations were doing in the cities, especially with what was called the institutional church, see A. I. Abell, *The Urban Impact on American Protestantism, 1865-1900* (Harvard Historical Studies LIV, Cambridge, 1943), pp. 137-165.

²⁴ *Forty-second Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society* (Dover, 1876), p. 160; *Fifty-eighth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society* (Boston, 1892), p. 134; *Sixty-fifth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society* (Boston, 1899), p. 160.

These alarming decreases resulted from the action taken by the General Conference of 1883 which allowed the yearly meetings to spend two-thirds of all sums raised within their boundaries on projects within their areas.²⁵ This meant that the strong Yearly Meetings, such as Maine or New Hampshire, could raise the largest sums, but it also meant that, due to population migrations, these were not the areas that needed the most home mission help. Consequently both the interest and contributions from such meetings dropped off while the counterpart of the situation was that the Yearly Meetings, such as Massachusetts and Rhode Island, which needed new churches, could not supply the funds needed for work within their own confines. In 1897 the secretary of the Home Mission Society pleaded that the General Conference Board be allowed jurisdiction over all the home mission monies but his plea was unheeded.²⁶

Leadership. At the time when the Freewill Baptists needed able leadership to counteract the disintegrating forces then at work, that leadership was lacking in both numbers and quality. In general young men and women were leaving the denomination "to seek, from various motives, spheres of life and service beyond its pale."²⁷ This meant that the number of young men that ordinarily would have been available for ministerial offices was considerably decreased. Of the remainder who did enter the Freewill Baptist ministry, many

²⁵ *Sixty-second Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society* (Boston, 1896), p. 127.

²⁶ *Sixty-third Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society* (Boston, 1897), p. 128.

²⁷ "Freewill Baptist Denomination," p. 404. In 1904 the field secretary of the General Conference, Reverend H. M. Ford, lamented the loss of Freewill Baptist young people in general in the following choice language: "Young men have their faces set towards the business world rather than the celestial world. Heaven seems a good ways off these times and uninteresting as compared with this present world with its glitter and bustle. A good live successful devil with a good salary looks more interesting as an ideal to the average young man than an angel down with nervous prostration and unable to meet his bills." *Minutes of the Thirty-second General Conference of Freewill Baptists* (Boston, 1904), pp. 66-67.

subsequently left because of the restrictions imposed by a small denomination. Many blasts were levelled at such "hirelings." Cheney, in a Lawrence, Massachusetts, address, censured those who left the smaller denomination for the larger, motivated in so doing, solely by salary considerations.²⁸ The author of the article in the *Quarterly* on the Freewill Baptist denomination branded as "miserable" the apology offered by those who left the denomination saying that "its prestige is small and the honours and distinctions which it awards are of little value."²⁹ He urged young men to stay in the smaller body in spite of "God's call to a larger one" because "a sort of leadership might be maintained in the smaller body which would be lost in the larger one."³⁰

Whatever the motives for leaving were, the effects were disastrous. In 1880, 114 of the 290 Freewill Baptist churches in Maine were without pastors and Maine had about one-fifth of all Freewill Baptist churches!³¹ Further, the secretary of the Home Mission Society said that "what is true of Maine is likewise true in a greater or less degree of the other New England and middle States."³²

At the same time there was a dearth of men for foreign service. The "hard search for men" for overseas duty had been fruitless and the conclusion was reached that it was as necessary to plan and work for men as to pray for them.³³

Not only were men lacking in numbers, but also the training of those who remained in the denomination was inadequate compared to the standards of the day. In an address before the Alumni Association of the Cobb Divinity School in 1903, Alfred Williams Anthony said that twelve of the

²⁸ E. B. Cheney, *The Story of the Life and Work of Oren B. Cheney, Founder and First President of Bates College* (Boston, 1907), p. 301.

²⁹ "Freewill Baptist Denomination," pp. 404-405.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Forty-sixth Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society* (Dover, 1880), p. 19.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 20.

³³ *Fifty-second Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Foreign Mission Society* (Boston, 1886), p. 3.

twenty-five men then at Cobb were undertaking a "combined course" of college and seminary studies, and as soon as they receive their college degree, they stopped their formal theological training altogether, hoping to "make it up" while in the pastorate. This, said Anthony, is deplorable because it meant that the majority of Freewill Baptist ministers then being trained was entering upon the sacred calling with abbreviated instruction.³⁴

RESULTS OF THE DECLINE

Reunion Rumours. One of the repercussions of the numerical and financial decline of the Freewill Baptists was the persistent rumour that they had fulfilled their mission and consequently were ready for reunion with the Baptists. The earliest public mention of this, as indicated on the first page of this chapter, was in 1859. In his message Dexter Waterman recounted the familiar story that Randall was disfellowshipped for theological reasons so that the Freewill Baptists were providentially called into being to proclaim a neglected truth. But he continued:

That they [the Freewill Baptists] honorably and successfully fulfilled their mission may be seen in the gratifying fact that the evangelical denominations are rapidly approximating each other and the views of that people who expressed non-fellowship with Brother Randall have become so modified that in the opinion of many of their ministers, we might and ought to be one denomination.³⁵

Judiciously Waterman did not then state what he or other Freewill Baptist leaders thought of this particular idea of one people but at least it is an approach towards reunion.

Nearly twenty years later President Cheney of Bates was

³⁴ Anthony's address was entitled "History of Cobb Divinity School." Anthony papers, Dexter.

³⁵ Waterman, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

much more explicit in an address entitled "Denominational Adhesiveness" given at Lawrence, Massachusetts, in 1877.³⁶ On that occasion he viewed the "special work of our hands" as the union of all liberal Baptists, and by that he meant a voluntary association of all Baptists who were of one mind on such questions as free will and open communion. But he was even more categorical a little further on in the same address. He asked the question whether Freewill Baptists would always remain a separate people, and although he said that he himself did not expect to live to see the day of reunion, he felt that it would come in "God's own good time." His reason, as Waterman's, was that there was no longer any theological need for a separate existence and he urged that if Freewill Baptists kept working and building "so much more influence we shall have and the sooner that which many of our own number and many in the larger Baptist body desire, namely the union of all Baptists will be consummated."³⁷

Consolidation. Another effect of the decline was the consolidation of several of the Freewill Baptist agencies into one organization. The most notable of these developments was the incorporation of General Conference in 1891. This meant that all the benevolent societies of the denomination, except the Publishing House, were put under the control and supervision of the General Conference, which met triennially, and under the General Conference Board which met at least semi-annually. This step was taken as an explicit result of the declining benevolent revenues,³⁸ and equipped the Freewill

³⁶ This address is reprinted in E. B. Cheney, *Life*, pp. 293-302.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

³⁸ *Free Baptist Register and Yearbook* (Boston, 1896), p. 123. See also Thomas H. Stacy, "Free Baptist Societies," *The Watchman*, October 5, 1911. Stacy said that the incorporation was the outgrowth of the conviction that there was a better way to administer benevolent funds than had yet been tried. This sentiment harmonizes with the brief account of the recklessness of home mission efforts described above, pp. 159-160. Alfred Williams Anthony, in the letter to his classmates of Cobb Divinity School, said that "denominational cohesiveness is vanishing." January 30, 1894. A move that would avoid the "break up" of the denomination was obviously imperative.

Baptists with greater mobility when union negotiations began.³⁹

Other coalitions occurred throughout the denomination. In 1888 the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society of Maine consolidated with the three Maine Yearly Meetings to form the Maine Free Baptist Association. In 1891 the New England Free Baptist Association was organized and included in its sphere of operation all the Free Baptist Associations of New England, except the Maine Free Baptist Association. The Central Association of New York and Pennsylvania, organized in 1896, coalesced the Freewill Baptist movement in those States, as the Ohio Free Baptist Association did in Ohio, Kentucky, the rest of Pennsylvania not in the Central Association, and West Virginia.

REUNION ANTICIPATED

Once the diminution of their abilities and strengths was recognized by the Freewill Baptists, demands for coalitions were inevitable. The first official expression of reunion sentiment was made at the Twenty-sixth General Conference held in Marion, Ohio, in 1886. At that time the Freewill Baptists went on record as holding the following:

1. We believe in the spiritual unity of all the followers of our divine Lord and desire to manifest his spirit so as to evince our unity with him and with all who love him.
2. We are ready to form such alliances with other Christian bodies as may promise larger results in advancing our Lord's kingdom.

³⁹ The incorporation of General Conference was opposed by a group led by Reverend Thomas E. Peden, then of Ohio. *Minutes of the Thirty-third General Conference of Free Baptists* (Boston, 1907), p. 104. We do not have the express objections to incorporation, but since the "Pedenites" declared themselves as the legitimate successors of the founding fathers who remained unincorporated we may assume that they felt incorporation was a departure from the founders' position. The Pedenites soon centred in North Carolina, where they fellowshiped with the Freewill Baptists, who had existed there since 1727 and who had broken communion with the northern Freewill Baptists on the question of slavery. *Minutes of the Thirty-sixth General Conference of Free Baptists* (Auburn, Maine, 1917), p. 62.

3. We regard loyalty to Christ and the Bible and the independence of the local church as a basis on which closer relationships with other Christian bodies may be attained.⁴⁰

These views were expressed in 1886 because prior to that time the Freewill Baptists had received overtures for union from the Christian Connection, the Disciples, and the Congregationalists.⁴¹ However, nothing came of any of these proposals. To the Freewill Baptists the Christians appeared to "lack a loyalty to the doctrine of the divinity of our Lord," the Disciples were not sufficiently organized to negotiate a merger, and the Congregationalists were paedo-Baptists.

While these overtures came to nought, and the official records are silent on the union question from 1886 until 1904, there is abundant evidence that union consensus was not dead, but, on the contrary, constantly at work under the surface, largely in local and private circles. Alfred Williams Anthony later said that the tendencies towards union in this period were as difficult to trace as the sources of a stream, but just as real and powerful.⁴² Joseph W. Mauck wrote that twenty years before 1911 some Michigan Freewill Baptists advocated reunion but nothing came of it, while forty years before 1911 some New York City Baptists had expressed themselves as favourable to the project.⁴³

However, the first permanent steps towards union were taken by the Wisconsin Yearly Meeting and the Minnesota Yearly Meeting, both prior to 1904.⁴⁴ Also, sometime before 1904 and apparently after and independent of the western action, some Freewill Baptists and Baptists in Maine met in Augusta on the matter of denominational union. They

⁴⁰ Reprinted in the *Minutes of General Conference*, 1904, p. 142.

⁴¹ In an address by Anthony delivered before the Baptist Congress which met at Baltimore in November 1907, and published in *The Organic Union of Baptists, Free Baptists and Disciples of Christ* (New York, n.d.), p. 24.

⁴² "Historic Steps," *The Watchman*, October 5, 1911.

⁴³ "Reunion of Baptists and Free Baptists," *The Watchman*, October 5, 1911.

⁴⁴ Anthony, "Historic Steps."

came to the conclusion on that occasion that "the Baptists and Free Baptists are so near together in faith and practice that co-operation is not only desirable but may be made practicable."⁴⁵

The report of the action thus taken in Maine reached Rhode Island "through private channels," so that sometime before October 1904 Rhode Island Baptists and Freewill Baptists had publicly approved the sentiments expressed privately by their Maine counterparts.

In that same year, in July, *The Standard*, the regular Baptist paper published in Chicago, printed an article entitled "Is the Free Baptist Denomination Needed?" written by an anonymous Freewill Baptist. He stated that "for a number of years" the belief that the Baptists and Freewill Baptists should unite had been growing in "the minds and hearts of many members of both denominations."⁴⁶ He gave various reasons for this growth; among them were the spirit of tolerance which was characteristic of the times, the softening of doctrinal attitudes, and the growing together of Baptists and Freewill Baptists on the matter of Communion.⁴⁷

In itself this article might have expressed the opinion of a lone Freewill Baptist who might possibly have been an outcast among his brethren, but the editorial answer given by *The Morning Star* is telling. In reply, George F. Mosher, then the editor, questioned the validity of some of the arguments advanced by the writer of *The Standard* article, but added significantly that "our instincts favour all practicable union among Christians provided that there can be more assurance given that the Free Baptist principles which are scriptural will be preserved."⁴⁸

In the next issue Mosher spoke even more pointedly when he said: "The people of our denomination have been burning to take up this discussion for some time, and only fear

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *The Standard*, July 4, 1904.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Morning Star*, June 30, 1904.

of a reactionary effect, harmful to our mission interests, has hindered."⁴⁹

Apparently Mosher was correct, for an unknown author, writing some time after 1908, supported the editor when he said that "individuals and local churches in fact have long been uniting with other bodies, beginning a great while before the union question took on its denomination-wide proportions at the General Conference of 1904."⁵⁰

In this same vein of thinking, Anthony wrote that the General Conference of 1904 would not have appointed the Committee for Conference with Other Christian Bodies except that there "was the conviction in the minds of many Free Baptists that the combination of doctrines originally preached by the founders of the denomination had been so far adopted by other Christian churches as to make the separate testimony of Free Baptists less important if indeed necessary at all as in former years."⁵¹

It is indisputable, then, that the union issue was very much alive and expanding long before the General Conference of 1904 took its decisive action. One thing remains to be said about these reunion anticipations. They sprang from Maine and Rhode Island in the East and from Minnesota and Michigan in the West, and, as far as we can now tell, these considerations were independent of each other. It is understandable why the western Freewill Baptists should raise the reunion banner. There were only 22,572 Freewill Baptists in churches in Chicago and westward in 1901, which meant that they were widely dispersed.⁵² H. M. Ford, the field secretary of the General Conference, described the western Freewill Baptists as "the lone star in stellar space," and he added that because of their loneliness and isolation many Freewill

⁴⁹ *Morning Star*, July 7, 1904.

⁵⁰ From an undated and unsigned typescript addressed to A. W. Anthony entitled "Will We Do It?" in the Anthony papers, A.B.H.S.

⁵¹ "Twenty Years After," a pamphlet written by Anthony in 1924. It reviewed the steps leading to union and gave some account of the negotiations, but concentrated on the effects of the union.

⁵² *Free Baptist Register and Yearbook* (Boston, 1901), p. 60.

Baptists were being driven back East to their own flock or into other denominations.⁵³ Union with kindred Baptists was a simpler solution than another trip East, especially since theological and practical differences had already been minimized if not eradicated.

The eastern consideration of union cannot be attributed to these causes. Here the Freewill Baptists were at their zenith in numbers and churches, having 13,703 members in Maine as compared to the 20,025 for the regular Baptists in the same State for the same year, 1900.⁵⁴ Surely their motive for union could not have been to join feeble forces in order to find strength. However, a clue to the eastern situation is to be found in the Interdenominational Commission of Maine which was organized in 1890. A. W. Anthony was active in the Commission from its inception, and so we assume that he was sympathetic with its purpose "to bring about combinations of weak rural churches and to prevent the competitive establishment of new ones."⁵⁵ Further, since it was Anthony who gave us the reference to the Augusta, Maine, meeting, and since he was a professor at Cobb Divinity School at the time, we can reasonably assume that he played some part in the movement among the Maine Freewill Baptists in their progress towards reunion with the Baptists.⁵⁶

We have, then, two district calls for reunion, one from the East and another from the West, both predicated upon the weakening of the denominational fibre and the theological adjustments mentioned above.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*; *American Baptist Yearbook* (Philadelphia, 1900), p. 100.

⁵⁵ C. T. Burnett, *Hyde of Bowdoin: a Biography of William Dewitt Hyde* (New York, 1931), pp. 124-128.

⁵⁶ It is not without significance that Anthony denominated the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America as "great" on several occasions and that he himself became the secretary of the Home Missions Council, an affiliate of the Federal Council, in 1918, when the burden of the reunion work was past. This language and position are indicative of his sympathies.

REUNION CONSUMMATED

The General Conference, which met at Hillsdale, Michigan, in 1904, had three significant groups of resolutions relative to union before it. The first group was from the Committee on the Denomination which recommended that the General Conference endorse the actions on union taken by the General Conference of 1886 and then proceed to pass a resolve favouring a union of the denomination as a body rather than union by segments and groups; the second recommendation of the Committee was that the General Conference consider union only on the basis of the independence of the local church which involved the matter of the liberty of conscience; the last was that no union be considered which did not make adequate provision for the moral and legal responsibilities of the Freewill Baptist interests and trusts.⁵⁷

The second group consisted of two resolutions, one from Young of the Minnesota Yearly Meeting and the other from Alborn of the Wisconsin Yearly Meeting, that the Freewill Baptists unite with the Baptists.⁵⁸

The third resolution was an overture for union presented by the Cleveland Ministerial Association of the Disciples of Christ whose representatives were present at the General Conference.

The consequence of all these recommendations and resolutions was the appointment by the Conference of "a Committee on Conference with other Christian people, to meet similar committees which may be appointed by other bodies, and consult respecting doctrinal and other grounds of union."⁵⁹

This Committee, which was to steer the reunion ship through the troubled waters of legal entanglements and the high seas of prejudice, had as its chairman the very able Alfred Williams Anthony. The son of a prominent Freewill

⁵⁷ *Minutes of General Conference*, 1904, pp. 110-112.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

Baptist layman, the prosperous Providence shoe manufacturer, Lewis W. Anthony, he had been educated at Brown University and Cobb Divinity School, class of 1885. After a short but successful pastorate at the Essex Street Freewill Baptist Church in Bangor, he was called to a professorship in Cobb Divinity School. Feeling unqualified to enter upon his new duties without further academic training, he went to the University of Berlin, where he studied under Professors Adolf Harnack and Bernhard Weiss. He took up the work at Cobb in the fall of 1890 and was at this post when the school closed in 1908. From then until he gave his full attention to the work of reunion he held a professorship at Bates College.

In many ways Anthony may be said "to have come to the kingdom for such a time as this." Because of his family tradition, many Freewill Baptists placed in him their confidence, and his positions at Cobb and Bates put him at the heart of the denomination. By nature patient, understanding and agreeable, he was well fitted to deal with recalcitrant brethren. His methodicalness stood him in good stead where legal and financial matters were concerned. Further, his writings⁶⁰ helped to establish his reputation beyond his own denomination, and his personal stature helped reunion matters.

One of Anthony's first actions as the chairman of the Committee on Conference was to dampen the enthusiasm of one of its members, George H. Ball, then the president of Keuka College, who, as early as November 1904, urged that "immediate action be taken to unite with the Disciples." Anthony, under the date of December 1, 1904, cautioned Ball against hasty action towards union with any group, saying that it was too early for anyone to express an opinion

⁶⁰ Besides innumerable articles, pamphlets, and reviews, Anthony also wrote *An Introduction to the Life of Jesus: an Investigation of Historical Sources* (Boston, 1896) and *The Method of Jesus: an Interpretation of Personal Religion* (Boston, 1899). His most important work, from the standpoint of this study, is his aforementioned *Bates College and Its Background* (Philadelphia, 1936).



Left Mrs Anthony

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and that the Committee ought to meet by itself first and discover its own mind before meeting with a similar committee from any other body.⁶¹

The Committee proceeded along the line of Anthony's suggestion and rather early in its deliberations decided that the gesture from the Congregationalists was impractical, because, in Anthony's words, "Free Baptists are baptists; the Congregational Church is paedo-baptist; the Free Baptists are not paedo-baptist."⁶²

The Disciples' overture was another matter, however, and apparently the negotiations for union with them proceeded a bit further before they, too, came to nought. Part of the difficulty with the Disciples was that they and the Freewill Baptists were centred in different geographic areas, and this is the reason for the failure to unite that was publicized.⁶³ But in an original manuscript of the article "Twenty Years After," Anthony gave other reasons which were not included in the printed text.⁶⁴ One of these was the lack of central organization among the Disciples which struck the Freewill Baptists as constituting a costly and backward step should union occur.⁶⁵ Another and apparently more influential one

⁶¹ About this time Ball wrote "My Personal Plea," which presented his reasons for immediate union with the Disciples. Evidently his "Plea" was eloquent enough for Anthony to feel it necessary to caution him. See the letter of Ball to the Committee on Conference, dated November 28, 1904, and Anthony's reply, dated December 1, 1904, both of which are in the Anthony papers, A.B.H.S.

⁶² *Organic Union*, p. 25. In another place Anthony wrote the same sentiments in different words: "The name of Baptist and all its implications had been borne by Free Baptists too long for them to dispossess themselves of it and pass readily under another standard with an entirely new set of traditions and inheritances." "Twenty Years After," p. 3. See G. G. Atkins and F. L. Fagley, *History of American Congregationalism* (Boston and Chicago, 1942), pp. 345-347; also *Minutes of National Council* (1886), pp. 351-352.

⁶³ Anthony, "Twenty Years After," p. 5.

⁶⁴ These reasons were written in the margin and on the back of the original typescript.

⁶⁵ It should be remembered that the Freewill Baptist General Conference gave them a very efficient central organization which the Disciples lacked. Some Disciples leaders, however, were cognizant of their need in this respect. See W. A. Parker, "Our Congregationalism: Its Perils and Safeguards," in *The Christian Evangelist*, April 27, May 4, and May 11, 1905; Silas Jones, "Our Congregationalism," *ibid.*, May 18, 1905.

was that "intimacy" with the Disciples had made them appear to Freewill Baptists as more sectarian than some who professed less about being non-sectarian. In this connection some of the Disciples' periodicals were sent gratuitously to the Freewill Baptists and they contained articles by Disciples which gave their reasons for having joined that body. O. L. Lyon, a former Methodist, gave as the reason for his transfer to the Disciples the latter's position on baptism.⁶⁶ After a long inner struggle he said he had become convinced that only believers should be baptized and that to be Scriptural baptism had to be by immersion. The Disciples' position on Christian unity also appealed to Lyon, being, as he said, "congruous with the prayer of our Lord in John 17." Lyon's new persuasions on immersion did not appeal to all of the Freewill Baptists, some of whom were practising "mixed membership," the custom of admitting into their church membership by letter from other denominations Christians who had not been immersed.⁶⁷ This makes it apparent why Anthony wrote of these testimonies:

so unfair and so unfavorable to other Christians were many of these reasons that the reading of them did more to prevent than promote union with the Disciples. It is a curious instance of partisan zeal defeating its own cause by its partisanship. ⁶⁸

Another reason why the proposed union with the Disciples did not come to fruition was the obduracy of the Disciples in refusing to yield a little on terminology and to exercise charity on the matter of differences. Anthony spoke of this tenacity privately as follows:

⁶⁶ "Some Reasons for the Change of My Religious Affiliations," *The Christian Evangelist*, October 12, 1905.

⁶⁷ Anthony himself by 1894 had abandoned the position that immersion was the only form of baptism. In a letter to a classmate who was serving a Congregational church and who apparently had quizzed Anthony on what to do about paedo-baptism, Anthony said: "I should baptize as the Church wished me to. There are too many good Christians in the world, having the Life and manifesting the Life, who have never been immersed, to make me hesitate long were I serving a whole body of such people as are you. I should endeavour to extend the Life." Dated January 30, 1894, Anthony papers, Dexter.

⁶⁸ Handwritten notes on the original typescript of "Twenty Years After."

The Disciples were insistent; if only we would accept their terminology, their names, they could do the rest;—make us over sufficiently to their ways—that was a strong impression made in conference with them. They . . . were not quite sure our two peoples were 'substantially one,' nor were they willing to say frankly that they would leave to the local church autonomy differences between although they already allow liberty to churches now in their fold. . . . They were apparently desirous of making us over just a bit.⁶⁹

The next official move in relation to the union of Freewill Baptists with both the Disciples and Congregationalists was that taken by General Conference. In 1907 it notified both groups that union with the Baptists would be acted upon first.⁷⁰

In the meantime, union talks with the Baptists were progressing at a commendable speed, although not without some obstacles. From the Baptist side the union movement originated in Rhode Island, where, as we have seen they and the Freewill Baptists conferred relative to union in 1904. The next action taken was at St. Louis in the spring of 1905 when the national Baptist societies appointed a Committee on Union with Professor Alvah S. Hobart of Crozer Theological Seminary as chairman. Further, three societies, the American Baptist Home Mission Society, the American Baptist Publication Society and the American Baptist Missionary Union,⁷¹ approved the following statement: "We are of the opinion that the Baptists and Free Baptists are so near together in faith and practice that co-operation is not only desirable but may be made practical."⁷²

⁶⁹ Letter to his Cobb Divinity School classmates, December 11, 1905.

⁷⁰ *Minutes of the Thirty-third General Conference of Free Baptists* (Boston, 1907), pp. 167-169; Atkins and Fagley, *op. cit.*, p. 346.

⁷¹ The American Baptist Missionary Union later became the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society.

⁷² Professor Hobart's address at the Baltimore Congress, p. 16 of *Organic Union*. It also appeared in *The Watchman* for October 5, 1911, in President Mauck's article "Reunion of Baptists and Free Baptists," and in *A Statement to the Baptist Brotherhood of the Steps Leading Up to the Co-operation and Union of the Baptists and Free Baptists*, a pamphlet written by Professor Hobart, p. 3.

The next move was a joint meeting of the Committees of both bodies in the Keap Avenue Free Baptist Church in Brooklyn from November 15 to 21, 1905. This conference produced the following:

Resolved that the Baptists and Free Baptists are so closely related by a history which long has been common and has always been kindred that they enjoy closer fellowship and a greater similarity in genius and spirit than are common between two Christian bodies. It is recognized as a fact that the original occasion and cause of separation between our two bodies have practically disappeared and that in all the essentials of Christian doctrine as well as of church administration and polity we are substantially one.⁷³

The May meetings of the Baptist societies, held in Dayton in 1906, adopted this Brooklyn resolution and added two more.

First, that while we affirm the autonomy of the local Baptist church, we recommend a free and fraternal interchange of member and ministers, and extend a cordial invitation to Free Baptists to co-operate with us in our evangelistic, educational, mission and all other denominational work in the earnest hope that complete organic union of these two long separated bodies of Baptist believers may be brought to a consummation in due time. ⁷⁴

This first official Baptist expression of the desirability of "complete organic union" passed without a dissenting vote.

The second resolution relative to union passed at Dayton was an expression by the Home Mission Society of its readiness to co-operate with the Freewill Baptists "whenever and wherever it can be legally done."⁷⁵ This qualification was undoubtedly made because of the difficulty of uniting congregationally autonomous churches.

This overture by the Home Mission Society was of great

⁷³ Anthony, "Historic Steps."

⁷⁴ Hobart, *Statement*, p. 3.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

import since the Baptists had already made known the fact that because they had no central body to receive the Freewill Baptist denomination as a whole (they did not have such until the Northern Baptist Convention was organized in 1907) any union would needs be by co-operation in missionary work, which, it was hoped, would eventually lead to complete organic union. They had said: "Union, with us, means identification with missionary work and free exchange of members, but not any attempt to unite or control local congregations."⁷⁶ The Freewill Baptists accepted this and informed Hobart's committee of their assumption that

when our three societies and one or two of our leading papers and a few of our stronger conventions have expressed themselves, the denomination has come pretty near speaking and the Free Baptists would consider that the Baptist denomination had spoken when this had been done.⁷⁷

By this gesture, then, the Baptists had actually begun the union procedure.

The following May at Washington, D.C., the Missionary Union and the Publication Society expressed themselves in a similar manner, so when the General Conference of Freewill Baptists met in Cleveland in October 1907 they had three specific proposals before them.⁷⁸

It would seem that this General Conference was the opportune time for the Freewill Baptists to accept the Baptist proposals for marriage, but instead they only approved the Brooklyn resolution and reaffirmed the "spiritual unity" sentiment of previous General Conferences and agreed to maintain the Committee on Conference with other Christian peoples.

The Baptist Committee on Union, somewhat offended at this dismissal of their proposals, privately sought out the reason. In reply Anthony informed Hobart that since the

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4. Also in Hobart's address in *Organic Union*, p. 17.

⁷⁷ *Organic Union*, p. 18.

⁷⁸ The proposals are printed in full in Hobart's address in *Organic Union*, pp. 19-21.

action had come from three separate societies the General Conference was not certain that it adequately expressed Baptist sentiment, and, further, the Home Mission Society's proposal had been interpreted by the Freewill Baptists as an unofficial communication of a committee only.⁷⁹

However, the 1907 General Conference had passed a vote instructing its Committee on Conference to

confer further upon this subject, to invite the Baptists to formulate with them, antecedent to further discussions, some statement of common belief . . . which may indicate a common principle under which our differences in faith and practice, so far as they still survive, may be tolerated . . . such agreement to be submitted to the constituent bodies of this General Conference by the Conference Board.⁸⁰

Pursuant to these instructions, the Committee met with the Committee of Baptists in Boston in March 1908 and formulated the one document essential to further reunion progress, *The Basis of Union*. This meeting first agreed to all the reunion actions and resolutions adopted prior to 1908 as a "platform of accord," and added to them the following: "Differences, if still existing, may be left, where the New Testament leaves them, to the teaching of the Scriptures, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit."⁸¹

The Basis of Union itself had but seven articles, the first of which was an historical sketch of Freewill Baptists and of the reunion negotiations, including the "differences" statement quoted above. The second recommended that the constitutions of the three Baptist societies be changed so as to admit Freewill Baptists to membership on the same basis as the Baptists. The third recommendation was that the missionary work of the Freewill Baptists be united with the

⁷⁹ See the correspondence between Hobart and Anthony on this point in the Anthony papers, A.B.H.S.

⁸⁰ *Minutes of General Conference, 1907*, p. 170.

⁸¹ From the extant materials one would not know that the "differences" statement was formulated to obviate the difficulty of the discrepancy between Baptists and Freewill Baptists on the matter of close communion. Dr. Anthony's daughter, Mrs. Dexter, informed me that she distinctly recalls her father's comments to that effect.

appropriate Baptist agency, while the fourth provided that all the constituent churches of both bodies be expected to contribute to the united work and that representatives of the agencies have equal standing in all the churches. The fifth was that pastors and missionaries of both groups be recognized on equal standing in all denominational activities. The sixth article was that union would go into effect by January 1, 1909, if sufficient agencies of the two bodies had approved *The Basis of Union* by that time. The last clause suggested that in States where the Freewill Baptists numbered at least twenty-five per cent of the Baptist membership the two bodies be combined under a United Baptist Convention.⁸²

The next step by the Freewill Baptists was in accord with the action of the 1907 General Conference, namely, to submit *The Basis of Union* to the yearly meetings or state associations, as the case might be, two-thirds of which had to approve of it before any other advances could be made, and this two-thirds of the yearly meetings or state associations had to represent at least three-fourths of the resident membership of the denomination.⁸³

Within the next two years *The Basis of Union* was adopted by twenty-eight constituent bodies of the General Conference, representing a total of 44,481 members, while five other members of the Conference, with a constituency of 1,721, voted against the *Basis*, and one association, the Pennsylvania with a membership of 371, did not take any action.⁸⁴

The record of the Baptists in States where Freewill Baptists

⁸² *Basis of Union*, pp. 10-14.

⁸³ *Minutes of General Conference*, 1907, p. 170.

⁸⁴ *The General Conference of Free Baptists: Information Respecting the Action of the General Conference in Regard to the Union of Baptists and Free Baptists in Missionary Work and Other Denominational Activities*, pp. 6-7. In a manuscript at A.B.H.S. among the Anthony papers is the record of the vote taken by the New Durham Quarterly Meeting: "Be it resolved that the New Durham Quarterly Meeting, home of Benjamin Randall and the mother quarterly meeting, should be the last to endorse a movement for union which we believe to be immature and for which the majority of both Baptists and Free Baptists are unprepared. . . . Be it furthermore resolved that though in sympathy with a union of Christian brethren in spirit and work, we of the New Durham

had churches was equally decisive. Sixteen State conventions involved voted for the *Basis* and none opposed it.⁸⁵ The various societies and organizations of the Baptists also approved and accordingly changed their constitutions so that all Freewill Baptists were eligible for membership on the same terms as Baptists. This was uniformly done prior to 1911 so that at the meeting of the Northern Baptist Convention in Philadelphia in May of that year Freewill Baptist representatives were admitted as delegates on equal standing with the Baptist.⁸⁶

With these convincing voting records at hand, the General Conference at its 1910 session approved *The Basis of Union* and authorized the Conference Board to transfer and deliver its assets, both personal and real, to the appropriate Baptist agencies.⁸⁷ The actual transfer of funds, properties and other assets formally occurred in Boston on October 5, 1911, "with suitable recognition services."⁸⁸ This conveyance included all the Freewill Baptist assets except for *The Morning Star* which

Quarterly Meeting do hereby put ourselves on record as opposed, for the present, to organic union with the Baptist denomination." It is signed by E. W. Cummings, the clerk, who initialed the following, evidently addressed to Anthony: "I think if you had been present you would have despaired of taking the New Durham Quarterly Meeting over to the Baptists." This action is what we might expect from the home territory of the Freewill Baptists, but it is notable that even it is not categorically opposed to union and that the New Hampshire Yearly Meeting voted in favour of the Basis of Union.

⁸⁵ A. S. Hobart, *Two Denominations Uniting: An Historical and Explanatory Statement of Co-operation and Union of Baptists and Free Baptists* (New York, 1913), p. 4.

⁸⁶ Typescript in the Anthony papers, A.B.H.S., entitled "Action on Union."

⁸⁷ *Minutes of the Thirty-fourth General Conference of Free Baptists* (Boston, 1910), p. 123.

⁸⁸ The amount conveyed to the Baptist societies was about \$130,000 which was divided according to the purposes of the original donors, so that the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society received 55.12%, the American Baptist Home Mission Society received 39.68%, and the remaining fund was retained by the General Conference for emergency uses and called the "third estate." It was largely funds donated for educational purposes and it was turned over to the American Baptist Education Society in 1924.

was merged with the Baptist paper, *The Watchman*, whose October 5, 1911, issue combined the two papers.⁸⁹

It was at this historic Boston meeting of 1911 that the movement begun by Randall in New Durham in 1780 came to a suitable end for all practical purposes. Legally, however, the General Conference of Freewill Baptists continues to exist through the Conference Board which met as recently as 1938 and 1939.⁹⁰ The General Conference itself held meetings in 1913 and 1917 but has not met as a body since that time.

While the mechanics of conveyance were rather simple, many details remained that needed attention. To answer this need, the joint committees, in their session in Boston in August 1911, chose Alfred Williams Anthony as the special joint secretary of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, the American Baptist Home Mission Society, the American Baptist Publication Society, and the General Conference of Free Baptists. This joint secretaryship was in addition to the duties he already had as the Corresponding Secretary and Treasurer of the General Conference. He began his work as the special joint secretary on October 1, 1911, and continued in that position until it was abolished on January 1, 1916. In his capacity as joint secretary, Anthony served first

⁸⁹ In September 1911. *The Morning Star* had drawn up a sales agreement with the American Baptist Publication Society by which, for \$2,500, the *Star* sold its "good will" and the list of post office addressees of its subscribers to the Publication Society. In return for the cash involved, the *Star* agreed to cease its publication of quarterlies for Sunday School purposes, and it was understood that the weekly newspaper would also be discontinued, agreements having been made prior to that time with *The Watchman*.

In a paper entitled "Publications," written by A. W. Anthony, the decline of *The Morning Star* is rather fully portrayed. As early as 1906 it had been forced to sell its printing equipment and hire its printing done on a contract basis. About the same time a special campaign was conducted to raise about \$20,000 to keep the paper solvent. Anthony attributed the failure of the *Star* to the inauguration of Rural Free Delivery service which brought daily secular newspapers into direct competition with it, and also to the appearance of several excellent inter-denominational papers such as *The Christian Herald*, *The Outlook*, *The Christian Endeavour World* and *The Independent*.

⁹⁰ This is confirmed by a letter from the present secretary and treasurer of the General Conference Board, Harry S. Myers, to the writer, on December 30, 1953.

of all as the interpreter of the union movement to both parties. It fell to his lot to remove misapprehensions and misunderstandings of which there were fortunately only a few.⁹¹ Then as the treasurer of the General Conference he served as "almoner of denominational benevolence" because many Freewill Baptist churches continued to send their contributions for mission work through historic channels.⁹² It is difficult to over-estimate the benefits of Anthony's work during this period of completing the transition from a separate denomination to a functioning and co-operative part of the Baptist work.

REUNION REVIEWED

Since the formal contact for reunion occurred at national level, the test of the achievement is to be found in the local areas in the results as seen in the respective individual fields.

Mindful of historic Baptist tradition relative to the independence of the local church, the union negotiators wisely did not attempt to coerce individual congregations into unions where indeed they lacked jurisdiction. Rather, in Anthony's words, they left "local matters to be worked out by local men."⁹³ Apparently this was the path of wisdom because in most areas union occurred voluntarily. Later Anthony was able to write an inquirer in the South that "practically all of the members joined in the movement. There was little tendency to split off. The union movement has pleased the people generally."⁹⁴ We have a concrete illustration of local amalgamations in Lewiston, Maine, where

⁹¹ A. W. Anthony, *Getting Together: Baptists and Free Baptists for Two Years: Report of the Special Joint Secretary, October 15, 1913*, p. 7.

⁹² From January 1, 1916, to August 1, 1924, Anthony handled \$130,000 in benevolent contributions and legacies which he transferred to the appropriate Baptist societies. After his work as special joint secretary ended, he continued as the Corresponding Secretary and Treasurer of General Conference until his death in 1939.

⁹³ Anthony, *Getting Together*, p. 1.

⁹⁴ Undated letter, about 1924, to Reverend S. W. Taylor of Asheboro, N.C. Myers, *op. cit.*, wrote: "In other words, the union is about as perfect and complete as such unions can be."

three Baptist congregations combined in 1917 to form the United Baptist Church of Lewiston which church immediately launched an effective building campaign for a commodious structure and entered upon a larger area of service than any of the individual congregations could have implemented alone.⁹⁵

Other unions took place on the State level, of which the formation of the United Baptist Convention in Maine in 1915 is an example.⁹⁶ As such unions came to pass, local Quarterly and Yearly Meetings were eliminated.

Organized opposition to the coalition came in Nebraska, Missouri, and Indiana. The Reverend John Wolfe of Nebraska was the chief architect of disapproval, and he drew support for his dissent from the South-West Freewill Baptist Convention. This Convention of about 10,000 members had joined the General Conference in 1907 and had vigorously opposed the union of Freewill Baptists and Baptists at the 1910 General Conference.

As a result of the opposition of Wolfe and his colleagues, Dr. Anthony visited these States in 1912, "to show them how they might retain fellowship with the Free Baptists and at the same time enter into a larger fellowship." He was hopeful for a time that secession could be avoided, but in this he was disappointed. Mr. Wolfe succeeded in fructifying his ideas first into a Western Freewill Baptist organization and then on December 28, 1916, representatives from Kansas, Nebraska, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Texas, met at the Philadelphia Freewill Baptist Church near Plattsburg, Missouri, and organized the General Co-operative Association of Freewill Baptists. The Co-operative Association began publication of

⁹⁵ In the Anthony papers, Dexter, is a folder entitled "Union of Lewiston Churches: Free Baptist and Baptist. 1917."

⁹⁶ See a typescript in the Anthony papers, Dexter, entitled "The Reunion of Baptists and Free Baptists in Maine" for the narrative of the formation of the United Baptist Convention there. New Hampshire, the only other State to have a united convention, organized it in 1916. Walter L. Cook, *The Story of Maine Baptists, 1904-1954* (Waterville, Maine, 1954), devotes chapter four, pp. 37-45, to a discussion of the merger in that State.

what they called *The New Morning Star* and also founded a college in Tecumseh, Oklahoma.

The Co-operative Association existed as such until 1930 when its name was changed to the Western Association. In the meantime the North Carolina group of Freewill Baptists had organized as the General Conference of Freewill Baptists, and, beginning in 1927, these two groups had an interchange of visitors at their annual meetings. This friendly intercourse resulted in merger of the two bodies in July 1935 under the name of the National Association of Freewill Baptists, a body with about 450,000 members today. Their headquarters are at Nashville, Tennessee.⁹⁷

This opposition to the union was definitely an upstream eddy running against the current of ecumenicity then beginning to spread in American denominational life. The organization of the Northern Baptist Convention in 1907, the founding of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America in 1908 and the union of the Baptists and Freewill Baptists in the Maritime Provinces are all indicative of the sentiment for church unity which made its appearance around the turn of the century.⁹⁸ In this setting, the Freewill Baptists had the distinction of pointing the way. They furnished, as one of their leaders said, "The first concrete illustration of a denomination moving as a united whole to co-operation and an ultimate organic union." It was, in this unknown author's words, "the last great mission" of the Freewill Baptists as a separate denomination.⁹⁹ Indeed, it was fitting conclusion to a movement, which, as a protest against Calvinism, had accomplished its mission and recognized that it had no further reason for a separate corporate existence.

⁹⁷ *Contact*, December 1953, pp. 4-6. This is a publication of the present National Association of Freewill Baptists.

⁹⁸ W. W. Sweet, *Story of Religion in America* (rev. ed., New York, 1939), p. 595, lists twelve church unions in the United States up to and including the Methodist reunion of 1939. See George E. Levy, *The Baptists of the Maritime Provinces* (St. John's, New Brunswick, 1946), pp. 269-281, for the account of the Baptist and Freewill Baptist Union there in 1906.

⁹⁹ Typescript, "Will We Do It?"

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